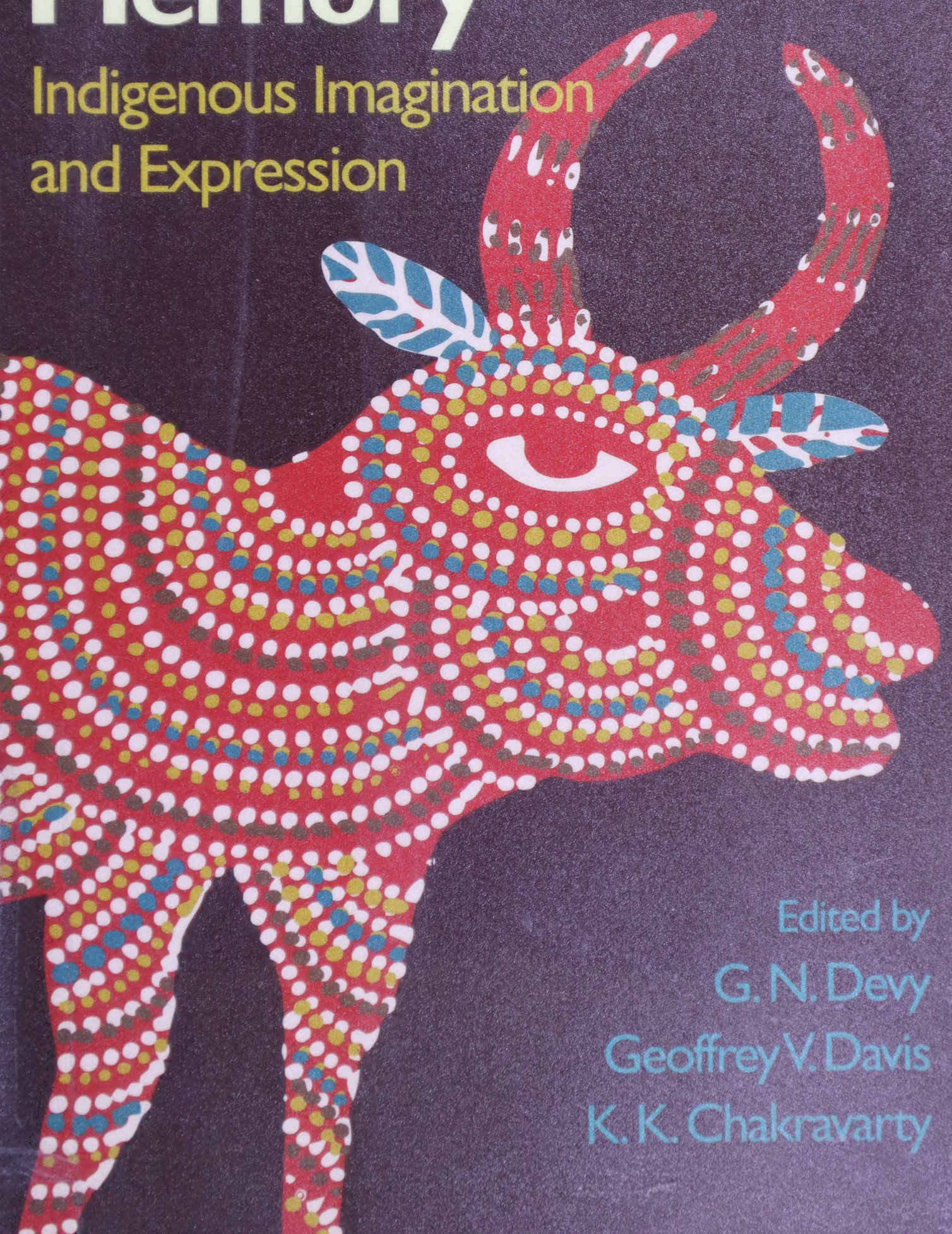
Orient BlackSwan

Voice and Memory

Indigenous Imagination and Expression



Edited by
G. N. Devy
Geoffrey V. Davis
K. K. Chakravarty

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Voice and Memory: Indigenous Imagination and Expression is a companion volume to *Indigeneity: Culture and Representation*. The essays present a critical enquiry into the cultures and literatures of indigenous communities. They deal with their stories of colonial experience, their marginalization and their struggles to avert the decline of their socio-cultural status, and the emergence of their voice in the respective national literature. Rather than seeking succour from a human rights regime, Aboriginal peoples have consistently looked for lessons of environmental balance and social regeneration in their own literature, knowledge systems and cultural traditions.

The essays in this volume show how these groups have acknowledged, internalized and adapted to their own idiom, linguistic and cultural nuances and expressions left behind as a relic of colonial presence. Further, in their endeavour to analyze the reasons behind their alienation, they have consistently been self critical, holding the white colonists responsible for their current situation, but recognizing and narrating instances of complicity of Aboriginal elders in the persecution of their women.

Running through the volume is the view that the indigenous people are agents rather than objects of change. They have the capacity to classify, codify and present their knowledge and perceive and evaluate changes in the environment. The essays also highlight the rejection by Aboriginal groups of the prevailing view of their cultural heritage as a "social problem", at odds with the imperatives of contemporary existence.

This book is a celebration of indigenous cultures rooted in their physical and cultural environment rather than an archival repository or a museum gallery. Bringing together scholars from across the world, this volume will be of invaluable interest to students and scholars of sociology, anthropology, tribal studies, colonial studies, literature and linguistics.

Voice and Memory

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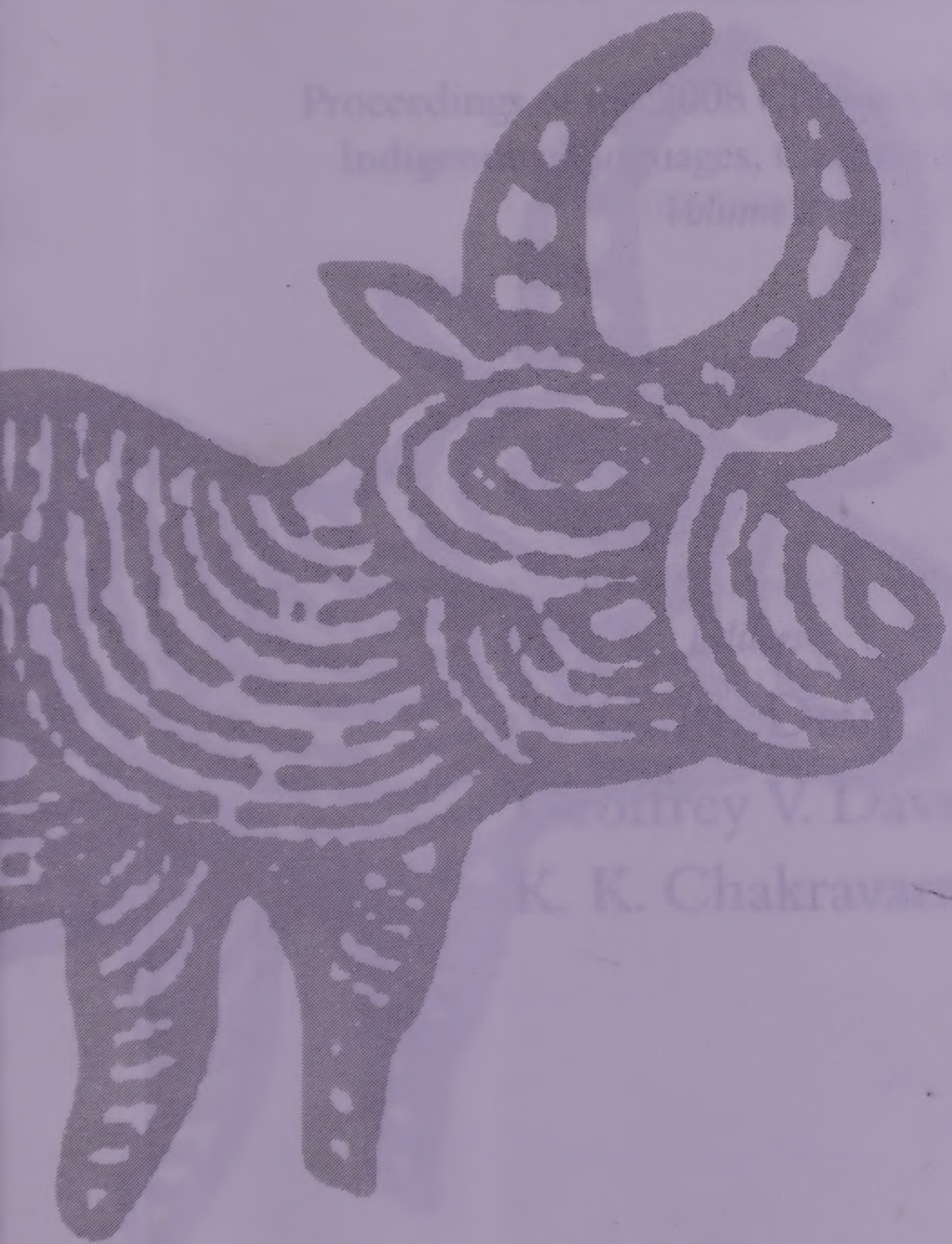
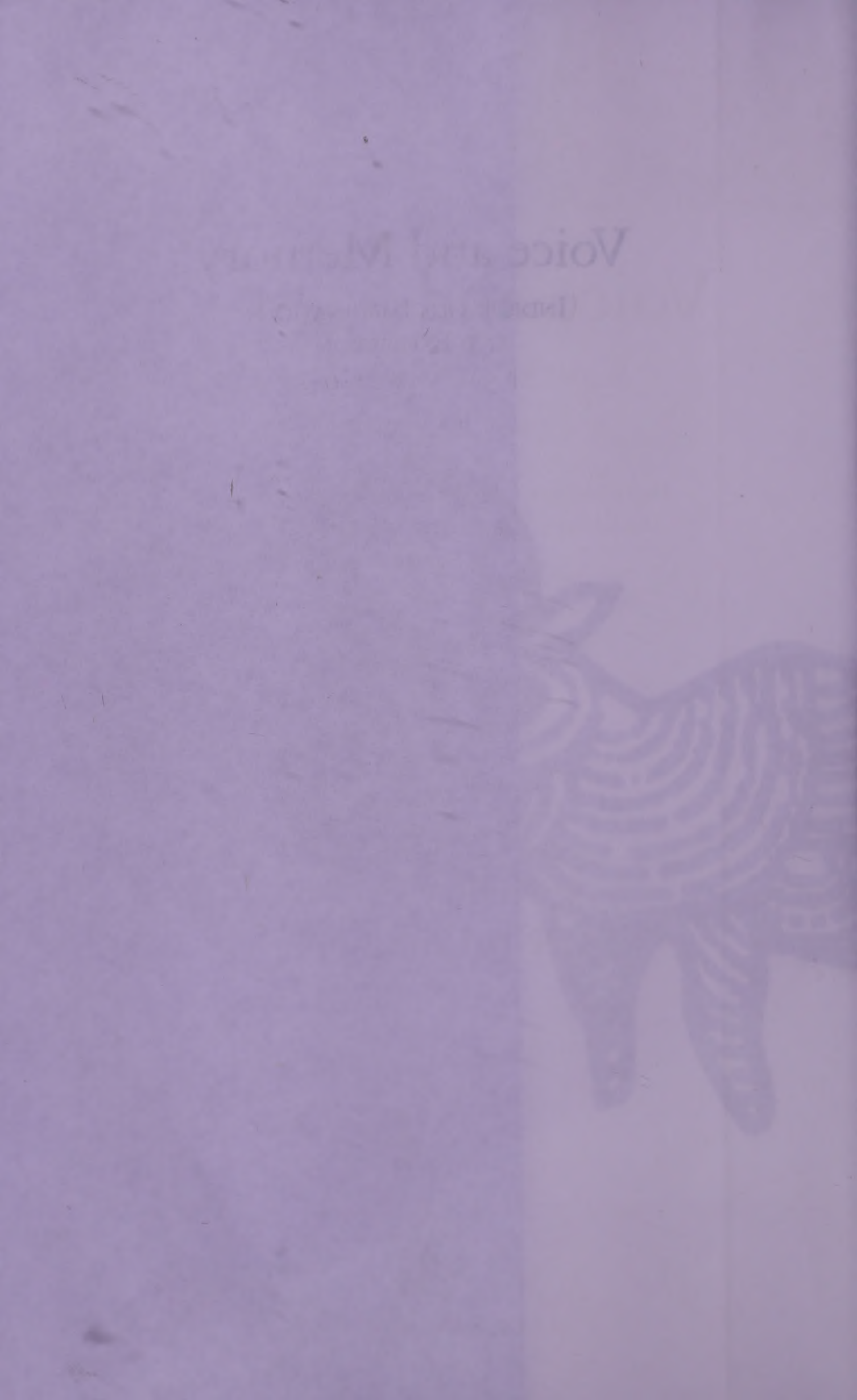
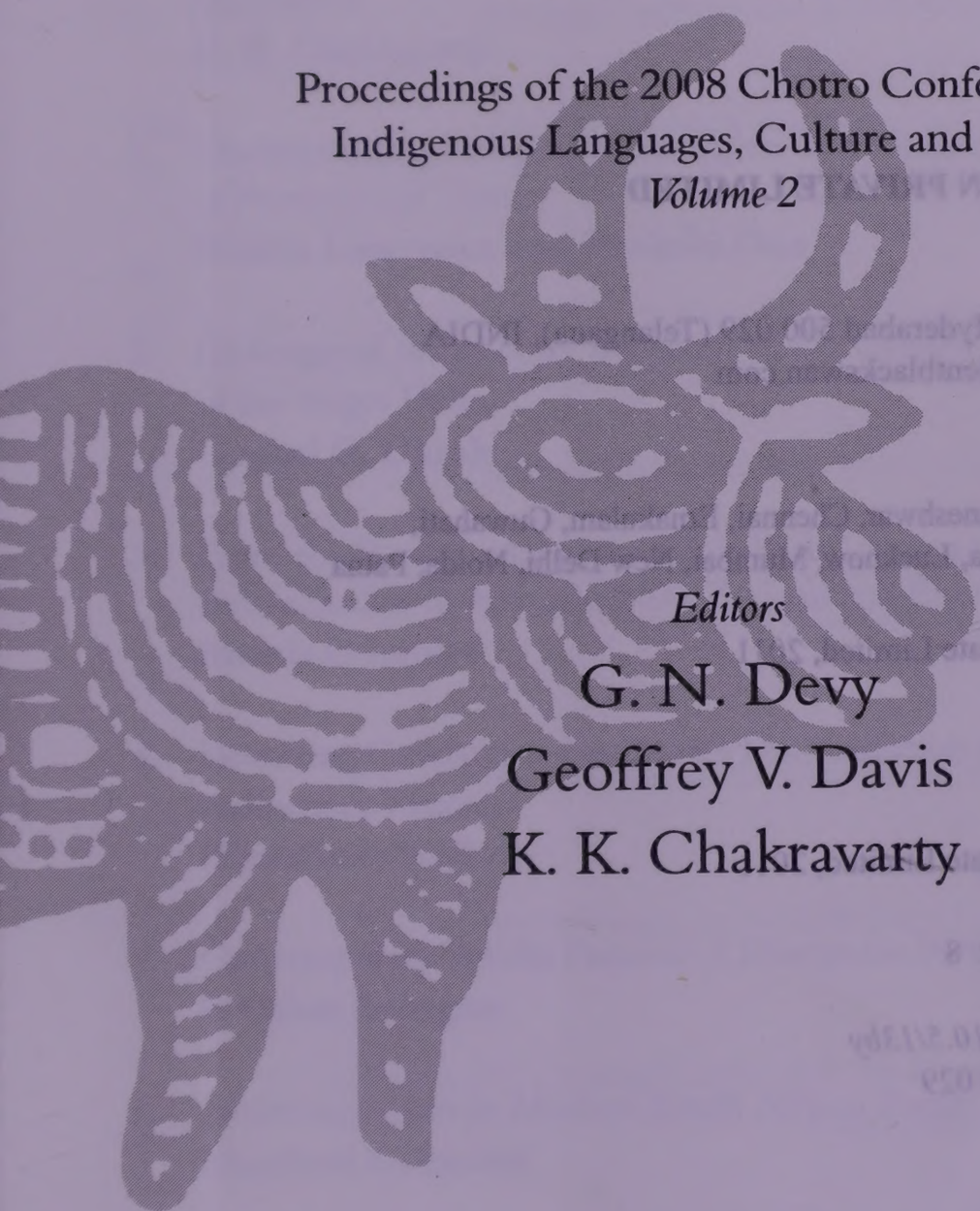




Voice and Memory

Indigenous Imagination and Expression

Proceedings of the 2008 Chotro Conference on
Indigenous Languages, Culture and Society
Volume 2



Editors
G. N. Devy
Geoffrey V. Davis
K. K. Chakravarty

Orient BlackSwan

Dedicated to

The indigenous peoples in all continents
who know that they belong to the earth,
not that the earth belongs to them.

Contents

Acknowledgements *XI*

Introduction
K. K. Chakravarty *XIII*

1. Understanding Indigenous Struggles: The Limitations of Postcolonial Theory
Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua 1

2. Endangered Indigenous Traditions of the Urhobo People of the Niger Delta
Godini G. Darah 34

3. From the Postcolonial to the Globalized Language: Revitalization in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Éire/Ireland
Muiris Ó Laoire 51

4. Rewriting Columbus: Coatlicue's Dramatization of Mexican Indigenous History
Christiane Schlote 68

5. Contemporary Yoruba Funeral: A Discursive Personal Narrative
F. Odun Balogun 78

6. Multilingualism in Modern South African Poetry
Manfred Loimeier 98

7. Cultural Identity and Rewriting the Past: Contemporary South African Literature(s)
Monika Reif-Huelser 109

8. Gender Violence in Postcolonial Aboriginal Communities: Indigenous and White Perceptions
Sue Ryan-Fazilleau 127

9. The Place of the Folk Tale in a Changing Society
Helen Oronga Aswani Mwanzi 138

10. In Search of Wisdom: Transformations in Indigenous and Postcolonial Discourses
Vera Alexander 149

11. The Ethnopoetics of Irular Ballads
A. Chellaperumal and Sujatha Vijayraghavan 165

12. Gender and Empowerment: The Folklore of Garhwal
Satish C. Aikant 188

13. Ngũgĩ's Indigenous Language Novels: Women and the National Cause
Joseph McLaren 199

14. Colonial Narrative and Indigenous Consciousness: Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Ignazio Silone's *Fontamara*
Stefano Mercanti 207

15. A Green Postcolonial Reading of *Kocharethi* and *Mother Forest*
Tom Thomas 224

16. Carib Palimpsests in Derek Walcott's *Collected Poems*
Kerry-Jane Wallart 234

17. Indigenous Hatred and Fear: Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*
Florence Labaune-Demeule 244

18. Vaacha: Voice and Memory in the Museum
Brian Coates and Eileen Coates 253

19. Indigenous Voices in Australian Universities: Towards a Collaborative Pedagogy
Julian Silverman 260

20. Education in a Second Language: Struggles and Achievements of Betta Kurumbar Children
J. Daniel Selvaraj 272

21. Mahasweta Devi and the Tribal: A Creative Discourse
Bodh Prakash 280

22. Narrating Tribal Entity: *Mavelimantam*, *Kocharethi*, *Ooralikkudi*
Asha Susan Jacob 291

23. Reading Maracle's *Sundogs*: Indigenous Subalternity and Resistance
Shaily Mudgal 300

24. Can the Bollywood Film Speak to the Subaltern?
Ajay Gehlawat 308

25. Sound in the Aboriginal Australian Films of Rolf de Heer
Bruno Starrs 317

26. Living and Learning in a New Language and Culture: A Linguist's Experiences
Annie Vinod Wilson 334

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We are grateful to Ms. Vidya Rao of Orient BlackSwan for encouraging the publication of this volume and the companion volume published in 2009 under the title *Indigeneity: Culture and Representation* containing papers presented at the Chotro Conference.

We thank Ms. Nilanjana Majumdar of Orient BlackSwan for providing invaluable help in preparing the press copy of this volume.

May 2011

G. N. Devy
Geoffrey V. Davis
K. K. Chakravarty

Introduction*

K. K. Chakravarty
Institute of Heritage Management and Research, Delhi

Recognized as "Aborigines" in Australia, as Māori in New Zealand, as "First Nations" in Canada, as "Indigenous" in the United States, as "Janajatis" in India, or as "Tribes" in anthropology, as "Notified Communities" in the administrative parlance of many countries, as "Indigenous People" in the discourse of Human Rights, and as "Adivasis" in the terminology of Asian activists, these variously described communities are far too numerous and dispersed in geographical locations to admit of any single inclusive description. It would be simplistic to perceive them as divergent victim groups of any shared epochal phenomenon such as colonialism, imperialism, modernity or globalization. In their ethnic, cultural and linguistic attributes, they are so varied that it is almost impossible to speak of them as a common constituency. No single term can describe them with any degree of semantic assuredness, nor can any universal definition of an invented descriptive term stretch without fatigue beyond the margins of a single nation or continent. The term "indigenous", for instance, as employed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), seeks to represent over a thousand different communities spread across all continents. Obviously, it would be preposterous to lump all of them together. Even if one were to accept this or any similar term for the purpose, its normative frame may run up against numerous contradictions with the strikingly divergent history of every community. Though terms like "colonized" or "colonizers" have learnt to perform at least a degree of communicational theatre, a scrutiny of the entire range of signification that the term "indigenous" is expected to cover brings home that most discursive concepts are perennially contestable.

* The first six paragraphs of the "Introduction" are drawn, with the consent of my co-editors, from the "Introduction" of *Indigeneity: Culture and Representation* (Devy, Davis and Chakravarty 2009), so as to give the reader of the present volume an idea of the nature of the Chotro conference.

Chotro, the first global conference organized for scholars and social scientists, who are engaged in a variety of "indigenous" communities in their own continents and fields of study. It was set up with a very clear understanding that it had no business to go overboard and start looking for any pre-conceived set of cultural or historical convergences. What was expected to be shared was not a set of conclusions and concerns, but just a space for articulation and expression. The conference was conceptualized as a place where an inquisitive and serious audience would "listen", internalize, learn, imagine and empathize, rather than as a forum where one was expected to "speak", argue, present and score points. In other words, Chotro was not designed to expand the frontiers of any specific field of knowledge, it was organized as an exercise in reducing our collective ignorance about the communities generally described as "indigenous". Moreover, even if convened for listening to or listening about, the indigenous peoples from various continents, Chotro was not intended to be "a celebration of diversity", as the cliché goes. In the context of the communities and cultures that were the focus the expression "celebration" would amount to a travesty of the existential disasters that these communities have been facing everywhere. However, Chotro was not organized as a mourning marathon either. It was not meant for foregrounding the activists fighting for the rights of the indigenous. While discussions in Chotro displayed a profound recognition of the importance of activism, it was by no means planned as an ideological intervention. Chotro was not organized by any local or global professional or occupational organization, nor was it aimed at creating any such organization.

Considering these definitional difficulties, it was felt that it would be best to avoid calling the unique convergence of scholars, writers and members of the communities, a "conference". When Geoffrey Davis and G. N. Devy started discussing the possibility of convening such a conference, it became evident to them that the term "conference" would be quite inappropriate to bring home the spirit of what they were to embark upon. Therefore, they chose the term "Chotro" while announcing the event. In many varieties of the Bhili language group, "Chotro" implies "a place where villagers gather", "a public platform", "a centre for dispute resolution" and "a place for announcing news". G. N. Devy gives the following explanation for the genesis of the term "Chotro":

> In 1996, I started work with migratory labourers moving to metropolitan centres in search of wages. They would work without any holidays throughout the month, except the new moon day. My colleagues started bringing them together on that day every month. We asked them how they would like the meeting to be named and they promptly answered, "Chotro". In these meetings many stories surfaced. These were narratives drawn from cultural memory and allegories based on contemporary social reality and conflict. There was quite a polyphony of literary tones, some in music and song, some in prose and even just gossip. "Chotro" gradually came to mean a literary form for those tribals, a form such as their tradition did not know but one that their lives in the context

> of modernity had created. Therefore, when we were looking for a suitable title for an international conference on the literature of Indian tribal people or the Janajatis, Australian Aborigines, New Zealand Māori, Canadian First Nations and American indigenous people, we were thinking not of a discipline but of a rich polyphony. Hence, "Chotro". (Devy 2009: xii)

Chotro was hosted jointly by the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre (BRPC), the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and the Indian and European Associations for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (IACLALS/EACLALS). The two associations, devoted to the study of Commonwealth literature and language, have been active in their field for the last three decades. They have attracted scholarship from all over the world and have both caused and witnessed a total transformation of English studies globally. The community of scholars belonging to the two associations has created postcolonial literary studies as a multilateral and multi-disciplinary field of critical enquiry. The IGNCA has distinguished itself in several disciplines and performing arts by focussing on aesthetics and cultural traditions in Asia. It has come to be seen as the most important institution for cultural studies in India. Since its inception, the BRPC has devoted itself to combining academia and activism, nomadic people's rights and tribal development, the conservation of marginalized languages and the dissemination of creative literature in them. The three organizations brought their energies and, more importantly, their political imagination together to create Chotro-1 at Delhi in January 2008.

The response to the call for papers for Chotro was quite overwhelming. We received papers from Canada, the US, Europe, Africa, Australia, Russia, China, South-East Asia and many parts of India. In all humility, we are tempted to describe this as not an international conference, but a global conference on the literature of Indian tribal communities and indigenous people in other postcolonial countries. There were papers dealing with more than fifty languages presented at Chotro, which in itself can be considered as its distinguishing feature. The conference cannot be easily described in terms of any single academic discipline. It dealt with literature, linguistics, language policy, history, sociology, media, film studies, theatre, music and visual culture. We were particularly fortunate in having indigenous people from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US, as well as adivasis from India with us. The range of presentations made during Chotro in Delhi and the wealth of detail and perspective brought together by them were so striking that it was impossible for us to resist the temptation of bringing out the proceedings. Had we decided to include every presentation made during Chotro, all the interviews and dialogues recorded as part of the documentation for the IGNCA archives, and readings by poets, it would easily fill four or five volumes. Following the event, we decided to select some of the presentations so as to compress the material into two volumes. The first of these has already been published by

Orient BlackSwan under the title *Indigeneity: Culture and Representation* in 2009. Professor Shirley Chew brought out a selection of some of the Chotro papers in a special number of *Moving Worlds*, which was launched during the Second Chotro Conference in Baroda in January 2009. This present volume being brought out under the title *Voice and Memory: Indigenous Imagination and Expression* is thus the second volume of articles selected from the papers presented at the Delhi conference.

The chapters brought together in these volumes make it evident that there are major areas as yet waiting for scholarly exploration. They include the study of numerous marginalized languages, their literary traditions, the aesthetic framework of those traditions, the origins of the communities, their mythologies and histories, their visual representations, artistic practices and art criticism, and the politics and the ideologies of these communities. The chapters included in the volumes have taken up for discussion specific histories of conflict and annihilation; the loss of language and neglect of intellectual traditions; the exclusion from knowledge transactions that the indigenous have to face; the question of representation as "savages" from an external perspective; their deprivation of natural resources; denial of access to education and other measures of social justice; their excitement with life and the expression of their joy; and the creativity of the indigenous communities. The historical accounts of various indigenous communities—their languages and cultures—point to the fact that in the history of colonialism the indigenous communities desisted from becoming "compradors" at the risk of becoming the perennially marginalized. On the other hand, the marginalization of the indigenous needs to be seen as the beginning, if not the source, of colonialism. A majority of the chapters brought together here clearly indicate that the study of indigenous languages, literature, culture and society may provide a rewarding future possibility for the postcolonial studies and make this inter-disciplinary venture the nemesis of anthropology. Similarly, these chapters clearly indicate that the borders of the term "literature" need to be extended in order to accommodate within them the creative expression in oral traditions, and that the idea of literature needs to reconsider its firm association with the notions of script and writing, and return to the more primary notion of linguistic creativity, whether in speech or in script.

The two volumes *Indigeneity* and *Voice and Memory* together provide a critique of postcolonial theory about the indigenous situation from the indigenous point of view. They pillory the non-white immigrant settler as much as the white colonists for the alienation of the land of indigenous groups. They blame Aboriginal elders as much as white people for complicity in the persecution of women. They preach the wisdom of acknowledging and domesticating linguistic and cultural nuances and expressions left behind as a relic of colonial presence. They implicitly question the feasibility of uprooting such influence

violently, and of embittering the present by nursing bitter memories of colonial injustice in the past. Instead of seeking succor from a human rights regime, devoid of concern for indigenous social or economic situation, indigenous communities look for lessons of environmental balance and social regeneration in their own literature, folklore, rituals, festivals and knowledge systems. Being human is predicated not on fundamental, constitutional or universal declarations of rights, but on the ability to buy food, water, healthcare and knowledge in the global market place. At the same time, indigenous women project their human rights against the tyranny of indigenous male elders. In their search for autonomy and an equitable order, the indigenous people evolve a polyphonic literature, which, instead of spawning hatred and violence, tries to build on difference, bridge divides, heal wounds and create a co-prosperity sphere.

The volumes speak of the revivalist strain in indigeneity. Ninety-seven per cent of the world's population speaks about 4 per cent of its languages, while 3 per cent speak the residual ninety-six per cent. The volumes describe the efforts of indigenous communities to preserve this amazing diversity of their languages from extinction. In face of the assault by the dominant language of Maasai cattlekeepers in Kenya the Yaaku hunter-gatherers have preserved their language through storytelling festivals (Devy et al. 2009: 121–32). The values of fair-play, honesty, and kindness are being preserved through Kenyan folktales, which illustrate the Kiswahili proverb *Mukosa mila ni muthumwa*—"a community without cultural roots is a slave community" (see chapter by Mwanzi). Versatile gestures, dexterous footwork, paralinguistic expressions are being used in an annual festival of Urhobo songs in the Niger delta of West Africa, in a cathartic spiritual renewal of the Nigerian language (Devy et al. 2009: 133–49). The dead elsewhere being considered Ijopha or slave spirits, the Urhobo transport their dead to their own land, use cult totems, satirical Udje songs and Ese ego-ancestral celebrations in their protest against slavery, social vices and taxes (see chapter by Darah). Manaka's theater of the dispossessed pits South African contribution to pan-African black consciousness against imposition of Afrikaans. It invites the black brethren to sing the "Uhuru blues, dance the Aluta dance, repaint homes, rewrite history, re-sculpt the country" (Devy et al. 2009: 230–39). Nineteenth-century stereographic photography of Heikum San Bushman of Namibia in South Africa cedes image sovereignty to the indigenous subject (Devy et al. 2009: 203–211). The Yolngu people of Arnhem Land in northern Australia come together in the annual Garma festival at Gulkula, a sacred site earmarked for a "bush university". In a joyous spirit of creative hybridism, they combine rock, reggae, country, Western and techno dance, with traditional mortuary ceremonies, Gunggul dance and invocation of spirits through the Yidaki musical instrument (Devy et al. 2009: 368–77).

The language shift is being reversed by revalorization of the Irish language and Gaelic script in Ireland and Te Reo Maori in Aotearoa New Zealand (see chapter by Ó Laoire). An Australian filmmaker acts as an aural auteur to the Magpie goose people of Arnhem Land. He uses Ganalbingu language, without dubbing and haunting, dreamtime tales and ballads, stories wrapped in stories, and strident diegetic sounds, to reproduce Aboriginal acoustic sensibility and eco spirituality (see chapter by Starrs). In the Bolivian Andes in Latin America, Aymara Shamans practise ritual activism to exorcise the alien and the strange and to recover the pristine native spirit, Ajayu, lost on their eviction from their mountain habitat in 1532 A.D., on the Spanish Invasion (Devy et al. 2009: 252–68). An account of the persecution of fellow Haitians by the hatchetmen of the Duvaliers, Haitian dictators, confronts the terrible other in the Janus self, and pierces through the screen of dissimulation by resemblance, to recover the fractured unity of the island (see chapter by Labaune-Demeule). The oral, written and audio-visual aspects of Aboriginal dreams, memories, testimonies, religions and landscapes, published by Anishnaata and Nyoongar communities in Australia and Canada as e-texts, celebrate the holistic, autonomous and integral nature of their thought (Devy et al. 2009: 47–56). The Aboriginal voice, preserved in archives and museums, is being dredged and released through apodictic poetry and mise en abyme, to restore the connection of Aboriginals with their land, kinship and community. The antanaclasis used in the fictive colonial history to change the meaning of Aboriginal names, words, stories and objects, is being combated through literature (Castro 2009: 269–78). The Vaacha, the Museum of Voice at Tejgadh, Baroda, transforms the Rathwa Bhil from a passive object of study to an active subject, leading self-help groups in ameliorative socio-economic ventures. The museum becomes the centre of their prehistoric habitat (see chapter by Coates).

Apart from looking at the revivalist indigenous imagination, the volumes address the theme of reconciliation, contrary to the stereotypical theory of an unbridgeable gulf between the indigenous and colonial groups. In Mahasweta Devi's story, Choti Munda counters the image of tribal violence by using his arrow symbolically, not to kill, but to convert opponents by moderation, negotiation and moral pressure (see chapter by Prakash). Derek Walcott retrieves the Amerindian voice, by collapsing the chasm of signifier and signified, and by using English in a palimpsestual layering of languages. He recovers the fern traces of Carib fossils, translates the black leaves of the forest, and writes "verses, crisp as sand, clear as sunlight, cold as curled waves, ordinary as a tumbler of island water" (see chapter by Wallart). The Uto Aztekan Nahuatl language is used to combine English, Spanish and Nahuatl orthography, arts and codices for turning the challenge of globalization into an opportunity for spanning cultural rifts across Central America, western USA and Canada.

In postcolonial South Africa, Khoisan, Malay, Isizulu, Dutch and Bantu expressions merge with Afrikaans and English in the English work of non–Anglophone authors (see chapter by Loimeier). Melodic Arabic patterns and notations are mixed with rhythmic Swahili metre in Twarab vocal music from the Comoros between Madagascar and Mozambique (Devy et al. 2009: 240–51). An East-African funeral blends Catholic funeral mass with Yoruba acrobatics, and ritual music, negotiations and gifts (see chapter by Balogun). South African novelists have invoked African humanism since the late nineteenth century for the enfranchisement of all, black and white. Reiteration, reinterpretation and reevaluation of the past in fiction is suggested as more effective than the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for remembering history and redeeming wrongs in South Africa (see chapter by Reif-Huelser). Urhobo dance, music and liturgy have been incorporated in Christian worship (see chapter by Darah).

Cree Canadian authors use European Sonata and English words in poly-planar stories to articulate the loon cry, wolves at night fall, wind sighing through the pines and the flight of white arctic terns in the northern Manitoba landscape (Devy et al. 2009: 295–305). Native and European narrative styles are combined to situate a young Aboriginal girl in Canada in a liminal, peripheral space of both white town and Aboriginal family, as too native, and, not native enough (see chapter by Mudgal). Indigenous counter-stories based on Métis creation myths, are used as therapeutic pedagogical aids to cure the predatory society of settlers of their sense of moral neutrality in Winnipeg, Canada (Devy et al. 2009: 75–86).

A bi-cultural history is created through a dialogue between a white Australian girl, who uses logo-centric itemization, and an Aboriginal tribal woman, who uses signs and silences, to connect landscape, story and history (Platz 2009: 279–94). Collaborative pedagogical modules are being evolved by combining discursive, informal, humor and knowledge systems of indigenous trainers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people with white board, written handouts and scripted session notes in the Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia (see chapter by Silverman). The boundaries between exocentric and endocentric communities have dissolved over time in Germany (Devy et al. 2009: 12–28). Mexican playwrights of the Coatlicue theater company in New York have fused Zapotec folk song, Spanish Gregorian chant, Hopi and Aztec creation stories to rewrite the story of genocide by Spanish Conquistadores (see chapter by Schlote). A partnership study of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Ignazio Silone's *Fontamara* describes and dialogically pairs strategies of resistance using truth force, non-violence or socialist Christianity against British colonization in India and fascist repression in Italy (see chapter by Mercanti).

Problems of understanding dog such collaboration. Translation of the "Book of Matthew" in the *New Testament* from English into Lubukusu illustrates such

problems. The English version originates in the work of a Jewish convert, written against a Mediterranean backdrop. The Lubukusu speakers of Kenya and Uganda live in a tropical eco-system. Their supreme god, headman, dietary practices, and names are different from those of Jews (Devy et al. 2009: 172–79). There is a need to resolve similar problems of understanding, by recalling the contribution of the Kirata Mongoloid Mech or Bodo language to the civilization of Brahmaputra Valley (ibid.: 163–71). Concepts drawn from the culture and world-view help construct bridges of understanding between the Betta Kurumba language and languages of adjacent communities of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karanatka (see chapter by Selvaraj). Problems of inter-lingual translation between the Indo-European phonology and grammar of Rathwa Barela and Dravidian Malayalam need to be addressed (see chapter by Wilson).

The volumes go on to address gender issues in indigenous ethnography. Zulu women in Kwazulu and Natal in South Africa speak, through songs synchronized with the rise and fall of the hoe, about the soil which helps them grow in an oppressive, patriarchal system (Devy et al. 2009: 180–87). In Kenya, a novelist uses the Gikuyu language and cosmology, in a fabulist style of magic realism, and mix story, song and bitter satire, to describe a neo-colonial male tyrant as a jigger, a louse, a weevil, a flea, a bedbug, a mistletoe, a parasite that lives on the trees of other peoples' lives" (see chapter by McLaren). Aboriginal Australian women novelists criticize white Australians for conniving with Aboriginal male elders, in a conspiracy of silence and denial, to suppress the truth about the rape, violence, alcoholism and substance abuse, to which Aboriginal women are subjected to by Aboriginal males, driving them to insanity and suicide. They exhort white Australians to get rid of their guilt complex about the attempt of their ancestors to eradicate Aboriginal culture, to place human and gender rights above patriarchal Aboriginal traditions, and to abstain from collusion with Aboriginal elders in the persecution of Aboriginal women (see chapter by Ryan- Fazilleau). Novels in New Zealand recall the battle chants of mythological goddesses and female warriors, to reinforce the agency of women against male patriarchy, to give immunity against Pakeha or outsider weapons, and to resurrect the Maoritanga or cultural identity, by constructing a "spiral of rooms around a decapitated tower", "a sense of apartness, connected to the whole" (Devy et al. 2009: 102–20). The gift of painting makes a Khoi San woman from Botswana a Goddess Treasure, despite the degraded condition of her life (ibid.: 223–29). Bodo women of north-east India weave their orality on dokhna cloth and sing "a bird or a sow I am not, that I may be detained in a cage or a sty" (ibid.: 163–71). The choric, reiterative refrains of the Irula ballads of Tamil Nadu build up inexorably to a tragic denouement for the young woman of the house. "On her grave grows the banana, on his, bitter berry". The Irula

house has a virgin corner and mother goddesses, Ammans, preside over their habitat (see chapter by Chellaperumal and Vijayraghavan).

A Santhal poet from the Chhotanagpur plateau in India asks, "who swallowed in our name the ocean made for us?" and exposes the usurpation of the land and resources of women, which have forced them into migration and commoditization (Devy et al. 2009: 191–202). The Garhwali women of Uttaranchal in India, separated from their homes in mismatched marriages, express their filial longings in poignant songs of Jagargatha séance. In the eco-feminist Chipco movement of Garhwal, they sing to the heroic women, who tied rakhi or the sacred thread of brotherhood around trees, and held them in embrace, to prevent the bio-prospectors from cutting them (see chapter by Aikant).

The volumes offer a critique of the developmental teleology. The Orang Asli in Malaysia, Khanty in northern Siberia, Ogoni in Nigeria, Kung San in Angola, East Timor people in Indonesia—all have been subjected to assimilationist policies of nationalism and Marxism in the global south. The Papal doctrine of discovery has given possession of Native American land to the white settlers. Mercantilist trade in slave and fur forced labour regimes in plantations and mines and punitive measures outlawing sacred customary practices, forced relocation in residential schools have subjected native Americans to cultural and biological genocide and drastically reduced their numbers (see chapter by Lawrence and Dua). Subjected to transatlantic slave trade for centuries, the Urhobos of Nigeria have lost their names, shrines, sacred groves, ritual instruments, art,ecological and cultural sites (see chapter by Darah). Use of reductive terms like Bushman for San, Hottentot for Khoi Khoi has eroded their complex kinship patterns (see chapter by Reif–Huelser). The tribals of Mavelimantam in Kerala are exploited in the name of both man and god by the Thamburans, settlers, or by the agents of Devaswam, acting on behalf of Lord Aiyappan (see chapter by Jacob). Naga insurgency in India has run into the morass of self-aggrandizement and violence, becoming the very malaise it wanted to overcome (Devy et al. 2009: 150–58). The majoritarian state becomes the outsider for the Indian tribal who complains against development that fills their rivers with earth, cuts their mountain for bridges and takes away their land for dams (ibid.: 55–69). The Mohawks have faced a military assault at Oka in Canada for resisting extension of a golf course to their ancestral burial ground (see chapter by Mudgal). Ethnic life writing speaks of the stolen generations, of the Crees and Métis of Canada (Devy et al. 2009: 163–171 306–18). White supremacist, xenophobic policies of fascists have subjected the native people of Spain to mass proselytization, persecution and execution (ibid.: 319–28). A Malawian novelist uses cryptic expressions, parables and riddles to equate the situation of forest creatures with that of the citizens of Malawi in Africa. Despite the end of colonial rule, one dictatorship gives way to another, and

citizens continue to suffer oppression. The author writes his novel, like Kalilombe sings her last song in the epic of forest creatures, in her tragic flight, hoping to release eggs from her ruptured womb, to hatch a better future (ibid.: 212–22). The Malawi dictator uses popular culture through his youth leaguers for persecuting the Malawi people (ibid.: 29–46).

Used as a label, postcolonialism has ignored pre-colonial and continuing traditions that distinguish cultures. It has united traditional cultures under the artificial rubric of colonial oppression, thereby reducing them to hostages of neo-colonial nationalism. The trickster figure of a Raven in native Canadian Haida stories has been projected as a burlesque wisdom figure that can negotiate the human-non-human, nature culture, postcolonial indigenous, literary orality divides (see chapter by Alexander). It would be easier to bridge the gulf between postcolonial and indigenous discourse if we recognize the omission in every memory, acknowledge multiple versions of the truth and accept the truth revealed by fiction but obscured by reality (see chapter by Reif–Huelser).

Apart from this comment on the destruction brought about by unregulated development, the volumes offer criticism of monolithic master narratives of national or transnational identities, which suborn polysemic counter-narratives of pure, virgin, pristine places in the world. A mutually reinforcive, rather than adversarial, relationship is suggested between postcolonial and eco-critical discourse, against the destruction of natural habitats and resources and their custodians (see chapter by Thomas). Suggestion has been given to go beyond an anthropological study of disintegration of the tribal domain, and the language of written contract, which essentializes, sequentializes and criminalizes the tribal as an obstacle in the road to progress (Devy et al. 2009: 3–11). The postcolonial theory has been adjudged inadequate for ignoring the alliance of the white colonial, hybrid diasporic settlers and transnational corporations in their hegemonic project to occupy land and destroy the identity of indigenous people (see chapter by Lawrence and Dua).

Chotro is a venue for bringing people together, who want to recover the rich legacy of silence, recognize it as a language, give it citizenship and tenure in the world of knowledge, use it to go back to the mighty and uncanny beginnings of pre-conceptual thought, and overcome the spiritual and moral homelessness and nihilism that afflict our literary imagination and life world. It is also an attempt to substitute the hermeneutic circular process of understanding the self by understanding the other, for the anthropological approach of understanding by objectification, fragmentation and reconstitution.

The term indigenous has been incorporated in the ILO Conventions 107 and 169 essentially for pre-invasion and pre-colonial people of Americas, Australia, New Zealand and other islands in the Pacific Ocean or European enclaves like the Sami, Basque, Catalan or Cornish. Underlying the international discourse is the assumption that the pre-invasion populations have been gradually

converted into peoples through colonial influence. The term indigenous has been extended to encompass the forest and hill-based people of colonized Asia and Africa as subjects for internal colonization through national integration or economic globalization. If the right to political self-determination has devolved to the pre-colonial people in the anti-colonial movement, the right to economic or cultural self-determination has not flowed to the tribal communities of Asia and Africa, even after they have emerged into political freedom from colonial slavery. The collective rights of such people, who are analogous to the pre-colonial people in their proximity to nature, and lack of hierarchy, have been subordinated to the individualistic definition of rights in the United Nations (UN) Human Rights declarations and proclamations. Indigenous and tribal orality, which is essentially unfixed and ideational, is now entitled to intellectual property right, only when it is fixed as expression, under the individualistic international legal regime.

Running through the volumes is an undercurrent of an idea of seeing the indigenous and tribal people as agents rather than objects of change, who have the capacity to classify, codify and present their knowledge and perceive and evaluate changes in the environment, induced by endogenous and exogenous forces. The volumes celebrate indigenous cultures rooted in habitats, in hills and dales, bluffs and spurs, rather than in an archival repository, theatrical stage or a museum gallery. They challenge the premise, spelt out in the UNESCO *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems: A Conceptual Framework,* 1997. In this, the Aboriginal period of human history is associated with sterile approaches, in which there was no concern for environmental sustainability. The historical limitation of the society in which the Aboriginals lived made it impossible for them to understand sustainability as it was impossible for Aristotle to decipher the secret of the expression of value.

The volumes assert the fact that the indigenous people cannot be reduced to a cryptonym, a normative deviation in the itinerary of the spirit from heteronomy to autonomy, or sublated and superseded, as an early and inadequate stage in the progress of the spirit to self-knowledge and self-fulfillment. The Western, colonial perception of the indigenous groups was deeply coloured by this idea of insufficiency of their culture as a contribution to human progress, an idea embedded in influential texts like Kant's *Cosmopolithia*, Hegel's *Theory of Aesthetics*, or Marx's *German Ideology*. The tribalization and indigenization of the Orient by the Occident, of the colonized by the colonizers, of the hill- and forest-based communities by urban communities, is part of the same process of supersession of the People of Nature by the People of Culture. The volumes question the colonial postulate that the later Europeanizing, technology-led, industrializing civilization is a more differentiated and mature actualization of the earlier, clumsy beginnings. They demonstrate the many ways in which

indigenous groups rather than the westernizing cultures have preserved the diversity and complexity of nature.

The volumes also address the problems of translation from the source texts of indigenous language into target texts of colonial languages. They do not accept the efficacy of insemination, invagination and fructification of the indigenous texts by interpenetration with colonial texts. Rather, they demonstrate the possibility of enrichment of the colonial language through incorporation of terms and nuances of vernacular dialects. They warn against misguided efforts to destroy the bio-cultural wealth, nurtured by communities, to tear indigenous music, symbols, signs and expressions out of their context and turn them into spurious imitations of the original or doppelgangers. They welcome the cross-pollination of names and nomenclatures between languages of cultures on the basis of an equal exchange. Today, the characterization, validation and certification of community knowledge is being done in Latin taxonomic terms, with the result that 95 per cent of the herbs are dismissed as scrubs, 95 per cent of the plants as weeds, 95 per cent of DNA as junk and 95 per cent of the ecology wisdom traditions of communities as irrelevant and obsolete. The languages of communities, being mostly unscripted, are receding before the invasion of a few scripted languages, backed by the state.

Indigenous use of the forest as a multi-storey habitat rather than as a single-tier timber resource is a corollary of the indigenous projection of the polyculture rather than monoculture of the mind. The eco-feminist movement, discussed in these volumes, offers a description of the attempt to bridge the dichotomy between conservation and production, between nature and culture, between utilization for profit and bio-safety considerations. The forests come alive in the indigenous literature as a source of physical and spiritual sustenance, affinity and consanguinity, as homologous to the maternal womb, as a sibling, lover and friend.

The volumes convey the message that the inalienable link of shared indigenous groups with their ancestral spirits, gender groups and posterity, is not to be ignored, to substitute an artificial market nexus. It is this supremacy of the homologic over hegemonic, of companionate over power-centric values that pose a challenge to the urban-centric postcolonial theory. The theory of *lex loci rie sitae* or environmental self-determination according to the principle of prescriptive possession is enshrined against the principle of *terra nullius* or *res nullius* or the principle of land vesting in the sovereign, the right of the community being derived only from assignment or absence of preemption by the sovereign. The entire history of community discontent can be traced to the supersession of the inter-generational attachment of the community to its habitat through the operation of an alien legal system and the alienation of their land by predatory flesh and poppy traders and harbingers of mega developmental projects.

The volumes make an ardent plea against the reduction of all sacred and ecological categories to economic and production categories, the merger of the psychic into the economic, and capitalization and commoditization of art, culture and religion. They celebrate the recovery of the creative commons, recapitulation of its mythology, alternative epistemology, and the voice of women, who have tried to preserve the pristine balance between nature and culture among the communities. It is time that the ultimate and transcendental values, treasured by the communities, are given priority over instrumental, proximate and existential values, and time that the balance between their intellectual and affective life is protected against over specialization and over commercialization. This is necessary because of the widening gulf between the growing power of technology and the fragility of the people who control it.

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Understanding Indigenous Struggles
The Limitations of Postcolonial Theory

Bonita Lawrence
Department of Equity Studies, York University, Canada

and

Enakshi Dua
School of Women Studies and Department of Equity Studies, York University, Canada

Introduction

Recent attempts to take up questions of indigeneity in the context of the South are often turning to postcolonial theory as a site that can provide possible concepts and theoretical frameworks. However, our experiences of theorising indigeneity in North America reveal that postcolonial theory not only limits an exploration of indigeneity, it as importantly undermines indigenous struggles. Focussing on this premise, we in this chapter argue, through an examination of key postcolonial theorists and the manner in which they take up indigeneity in North America, that postcolonial theory cannot be assumed to be capable of providing adequate concepts and frameworks to address indigeneity. While we come to this chapter situated differently in regard to decolonization and postcolonial theory, we share concerns related to how the central tenets of postcolonial theory erase and undermine indigenous struggles towards decolonisation.[1]

We have found that key postcolonial theorists not only ignore indigenous presence and struggles in the Americas, but overlook the fact that the Americas (and by extension, other settler states) have not been decolonized. As we will illustrate, such omissions raise serious questions about postcolonial theorising. Firstly, it distorts analyses of phenomena that range from colonialism to racism,

[1] For an elaboration on our different positionings, see Lawrence and Dua (2005).

diaspora, identity, postcoloniality and settler state formations. Secondly, such omissions raise questions about whether the concepts and frameworks located in this body of work can offer insights with which to explore questions relating to indigeneity. As a result, we suggest that scholars who are turning to postcolonial theory to understand indigeneity in the context of the global South undertake close examination of the possibilities and limits of postcolonial approaches.

Our arguments are founded in the context of North America, a continent where colonialism has not yet ended, where indigenous peoples are still struggling to reconstitute their nations and to reassert their jurisdiction over traditional territories. Thus we begin our argument by contextualising the particular situations of indigenous peoples in the Americas relative to indigenous peoples globally. Next, in order to ground our critiques, we offer a brief history of colonialism and settler state formation in Canada. We then turn to outlining the limitations in postcolonial theory. We illustrate the way in which postcolonial theorists considered "foundational" in North America premise their work on the assumption that indigenous peoples have been eradicated. We argue that such a premise not only erases indigenous presence and struggles for decolonization, but distorts analyses of colonialism, racism and diaspora, and privileges those of racism over the analysis of colonialism. We also illustrate the manner in which indigenous theorists are addressing crucial issues of indigeneity, for which postcolonial theorists have no answers.

With increasing attention being given to indigeneity internationally, it is important to understand what indigenous peoples around the world have in common. However, it is also useful to address broad distinctions among indigenous peoples, particularly in the relationships that different indigenous peoples have with the nation-states that envelop them. Accordingly, in the first section below, we will provide a context for understanding the circumstances of indigenous peoples in Canada.

Contextualizing Indigeneity

Maori theorist Roger Maaka asserts that a global movement of indigenous peoples, numbering approximately 350 million persons, and representing 5,000 cultures and languages across more than seventy countries, is increasingly being recognized (Maaka and Fleras 2005: 29). In grappling to find a common definition among this tremendous diversity, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations has proposed the following working definition:

> [Indigenous peoples are] those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors

> of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions, and legal systems. (Martínez-Cobo 1987)

A number of indigenous activists and theorists (LaDuke 2003; Smith 1999; Venne 1998) recognize the commonality of indigenous struggles for land and recovery of sovereignty globally. However, given the complexity and diversity of indigenous experience, it may be useful to articulate some broad distinctions, particularly between indigenous peoples who have been marginalized within postcolonial states and those whose land is occupied by settler states. In certain respects, these distinctions correspond to those between indigenous peoples in the global North and those in the global South; in all respects, these matters relate to being differently situated within the colonial project. These distinctions do not address the circumstances of peoples such as the Saami of Fenno-Scandinavia, whose homelands are in Europe, or other indigenous peoples whose homelands were never colonially occupied by Europe. But in some respects, addressing the broad colonisation history of different peoples enables us to be clearer about some of the circumstances that indigenous peoples face today.

Indigenous peoples in the global South have been frequently marginalized by processes of postcolonial nation-building, which represent a diverse range of circumstances. The term "Indigenous" may encompass peoples designated as "primitive" or "tribal" under European colonial occupation, who subsequently continued to be labelled and controlled as such under the formation of the postcolonial state. They may represent land-based peoples subordinated during "modernisation" projects, or externalized by nationalist movements struggling with decolonization. All indigenous peoples face the plunder of their lands by transnational corporations; in postcolonial states this is often facilitated by Westernized elites, who view the indigenous peoples within their boundaries as expendable to "development". The homelands of indigenous peoples in postcolonial states all too frequently continue to bear the imprint of past European colonial occupation in the form of ongoing wars which may be waged locally for profit and control, but generally continue to facilitate the interests of Western superpowers.

On the other hand, indigenous peoples who are colonized by settler states—most of them in the global North, although this also includes the settler states of South and Central America, which includes Mexico—are controlled by regimes whose very existence depends on the denial of the presence of indigenous peoples. Therefore, while their lands continue to be targeted as sources of exploitable resources, indigenous peoples continuously face policies and legislation aimed at destroying them *as peoples*. They are subordinated, often "internally" through policing, but also through direct military occupation,

within an ongoing colonial project that must be maintained in order for the settler state to continue to exist. Settler states, therefore, must always be ready to suppress, sabotage and deny the nationhood of indigenous peoples, regardless of the cost, not only to maintain control of the lands that are the source of their wealth, but to maintain settler nation-building myths.[2]

Indeed, the continuance of settler state colonialism is itself a function of the power of settler states, internationally, to deny that settler states *are* colonialist. In 1960, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1541 (XV) stated that colonialism could only be said to exist if at least 30 square miles of blue water existed between the homelands of the colonizer and the occupied territory of the colonized (Churchill 1995: 2). Instead of international recognition of the need to decolonize settler nations (which would have demanded a fundamental reworking of every aspect of some of the most powerful nation-states in the world), indigenous peoples within settler states have had to fight within the United Nations for recognition of special rights *within* those states (Venne 1998). In this, they have been joined by indigenous peoples who were marginalised *during* the decolonization process. So while indigenous peoples around the world, due to globalization, are in common crisis, generally have the same values as land-based peoples and have worked together to hammer out the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (ibid.), they do so from distinctly different histories and regimes of struggle.

We also recognize that there may be broad differences among the experiences of indigenous peoples with postcolonial states. In some states, the very act of asserting the ascendancy of "one" nationalism above all others has involved marginalizing tribal peoples, as well as other ethnic minorities in intensely violent ways. Other postcolonial states have devised methods of intense paternalistic control over indigenous communities. Meanwhile, in some settler states, torture and mass murder are used as instruments to destroy indigenous communities. In other settler states, particularly those which have adopted the guise of liberal humanism, the legacy of residential schooling and/or child welfare policies have left indigenous communities shattered and struggling with cycles of despair and self-destruction, while those who resist

[2] It is for this reason that settler states like Canada are willing to spend millions of dollars on police actions suppressing even the most basic assertions of sovereignty. For example, in the wake of a Supreme Court decision recognizing Mi'kmaq rights to maintain their own Atlantic Fishery, the federal government spent $13 million (Lightstone 2001) in police actions involving high seas chases and ramming Mi'kmaq boats, all to prevent a handful of Mi'kmaq fishermen from practising their court-proven right, even though their fishery plan allowed access to only 2 per cent of the $160 million fishery that white commercial fishermen currently enjoy (Coates 2000: 215). The police action was to force the community, known as Burnt Church, to enter into an agreement enabling the federal government to retain control of the fishery (ibid.: 201).

are criminalized and imprisoned. Within this wide range of experiences, we suggest that what is unique about settler state colonialism is the hegemonic manner in which genocidal[3] policies—focussed, multifaceted and often intergenerational—are applied to indigenous communities in an attempt to maintain control of indigenous lands, erode or shatter resistance, and force the survivors to assimilate *as individuals* into the dominant order, in order to nullify a collective and insurgent indigenous presence in the national imagination.

Within the white settler nation-states, land takes on an increasingly powerful intellectual, emotional, and spiritual force for native peoples as well as a symbolic and ideological force among settlers. It is, therefore, not surprising that the only nation-states who refused to sign the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are the four 'First World' white settler nations (Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand) whose claims of sovereignty over the territories they occupy are most threatened by any recognition that the indigenous nations whose territories they occupy *are* nations, with distinct land rights. All four of these settler nations engage in constant ideological attacks on any notion of indigenous sovereignty. It is for this reason that academic self-representation is critical in these communities—and indeed, the presence, particularly in the United States, but increasingly in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, of a growing group of indigenous theorists speaking for and with their own communities, is unique in the indigenous world. No other indigenous peoples, around the world, have been able to engage in this type of intellectual resistance (indeed, it is the resistance of indigenous academics and their communities to notions of postcoloniality that informs this work).

In order to clarify some of these issues, we felt it might be useful to broadly discuss what settler state colonialism looks like in Canada.

[3] The meaning of the term "genocide", as coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, during the discussions leading to the United Nations Genocide Convention, was given as follows: "Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killing of all the members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aimed at destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objective of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and the lives of individuals belonging to such groups .... Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group: the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor" (Lemkin 1944, quoted in Churchill 1994:12–13).

Colonialism in Canada

Settler states are founded on and maintained through policies of direct extermination, displacement, or assimilation, all premised to ensure that the peoples who are indigenous to the land ultimately disappear *as* peoples, so that settler nations can seamlessly take their place. To understand Canada as a settler state, it is useful to explore its history. As anywhere in the Americas, the backdrop is always genocide. As David Stannard writes:

> . . . for years now, historical demographers have been uncovering, in region upon region, post-Columbian depopulation rates of between 90 and 98 percent with such regularity that an overall decline of 95 percent has become a working rule of thumb. What this means is that, on average, for every twenty Native people alive at the moment of European contact—when the lands of the Americas teemed with numerous tens of millions of people—only one stood in their place when the bloodbath was over.... The destruction of the Indians of the Americas was, far and away, the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world. (Stannard 1992: x)

Indeed, the extreme levels of depopulation in the Americas—and its re population with European settlers—become most apparent by taking global demographics into account. As Tzvetan Todorov notes, in 150 years almost one-fifth of the earth's population—70 million native Americans—were destroyed:

> The sixteenth century perpetrated the greatest genocide in human history ... in 1500 the world population is approximately 400 million, of whom 80 million inhabit the Americas. By the middle of the sixteenth century, out of these 80 million, there remain 10 million. (Todorov 1984: 5)

Perhaps, it was this reality of the post-Columbian genocide that led Gayatri Chakrabarti Spivak, in a speech given in Toronto in 1994, to comment that indigenous peoples have been consigned to "the dustbin of history". This common assumption—that any viable indigenous presence died with this historic genocide—for indigenous peoples means being denied even the possibility of regenerating nationhood. And yet, in the settler nations, if indigenous nationhood is seen as something of the past, the present becomes a site where indigenous peoples are reduced to small groups of landless minorities drowning in a sea of settlers. In settler states, then, nationhood becomes the primary focus at the heart of indigenous peoples' realities. Their very survival depends on it.

Kānaka Maoli activist Haunani-Kay Trask has commented that discoverers and traders such as Columbus in the Americas and Captain Cook in the South Pacific brought mass murder to indigenous peoples in some places, while in other places they brought "capitalism, western political ideas (such as predatory

individualism), and Christianity" (Trask 1993: 7). As elsewhere, the colonial process in the Americas has been far from uniform. The respective colonial projects of the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English and French in the Americas took different forms, but often overlapped and affected one another. While both the Portuguese and Spanish established forced labor regimes on plantations, the rich gold and silver mines of South America and Mexico provided Spain, between 1493 and 1800, with 85 per cent of the world's supply of silver and 70 per cent of the world's supply of gold (Weaver 2003: 5). Meanwhile, the primary involvement of the French, British and Dutch in the Americas, for many years, was through mercantilism—encompassing the trade in both native American slaves and fur.

The native American slave trade, while short-lived, was quite extensive. Some regions in what is now the south-eastern United States and the Caribbean, were virtually depopulated by Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and British slavers bent on the exportation of native American slaves to parts of South America, Europe, and even Africa prior to and during the advent of the African slave trade (Forbes 1988: 26–64). However, of far greater duration was the extensive fur trading empire which encompassed much of what is now Canada for almost 300 years, creating massive profits and shaping the initial colonial encounter, particularly in Canada, with both the French and the English.

Native peoples in eastern Canada, in particular, were profoundly changed by the centuries of fur trade that preceded the establishment of a settler state. The fur trade not only altered the rhythms of how native peoples lived on the land; it slowly changed the ways in which they related to one another, disrupting longstanding political allegiances between different nations until trade warfare resulted. From oral histories (Sioui 1999) and from archaeological and historical records (Henderson 1997: 80; Dickason 1992: 103–7), these wars were unique in the histories of these indigenous nations, both in the scale and in the relative ferocity with which they were waged— particularly after guns were introduced during the fur trade and the Europeans began deliberately inciting warfare among their native allies against those native peoples who traded with European competitors (Hessel 1993: 40–48).

However, the changes would not have been so profound had it not been for the presence of missionaries. Although French colonial policies had focussed primarily on the fur trade, the monopolies they granted in different regions, under the terms of the Doctrine of Discovery,[4] included the mandatory presence of Christian missionaries to proselytise the natives. The missionaries appear

[4] The Doctrine of Discovery was the formal code of juridical standards in international law that had been created by Papal edict to control the different interests of European powers in the different lands they were acquiring. Its primary tenets addressed the terms through which Europeans could assert title to indigenous lands (Churchill 1992: 36).

to have relied on trade wars (and the epidemics which frequently preceded or accompanied them) to harvest converts from populations physically and psychically devastated by mass deaths (Sioui 1999: 184). Bruce Trigger notes that the Jesuits soon began the practice of allowing the traders to sell certain goods, particularly guns, only to Christian converts (Trigger 1994: 54). Such policies brought profound change, as trade advantage began to privilege those who converted to Christianity. This created deep divisions within communities that rendered them less able to unify for common goals.

By the 1840s, long after settlement had succeeded the fur trade in eastern Canada, a network of fur trade forts still stretched across western Canada from Lake Superior to the Rocky Mountains. The trade spawned a hybrid society in the forts where, despite the strenuous efforts of fur trade officials to forbid marriages between traders and native women, Englishmen married Cree women, and spoke Cree at home to their children (Van Kirk 1980: 131). In 1870, the Hudson Bay Company transferred the vast lands that they had exercised a monopoly over for so long, to Canada. With the nation-building project that followed, white women were brought in to establish "civilised" society, while police violence was utilised to drive native women and their children into the margins of the settler society that succeeded the fur trade (Carter 1997).

Establishing the Canadian Settler State

The nation-building project in Canada began to take shape after the American Revolution established an expansionary "competitor" nation, the United States, to the south of British-held territories. To avoid the extensive warfare that had accompanied early British presence in eastern north America, after the 1780s both Canada and the United States engaged in treaty negotiations with indigenous nations to secure lands for European settlement. In Canada, as successive treaties were signed, and settlers flooded in, native resistance grew. The British, therefore, employed guile—such as using the fur traders that native peoples trusted to negotiate the treaties and having religious authorities "work" on Christian Indians to sign them—and coercive measures—from deliberately spreading disease and promoting alcoholism, to allowing settlers to take up arms and attack native people, to "scorched earth" policies which destroyed the animals that native peoples depended on (which resulted in the collapse of Indigenous economies).

By 1850, the small colony of Canada (consisting of southern Ontario and Quebec) had consolidated itself as far as the Great Lakes and had adopted a nominal form of self-government. By 1869, the new nation of Canada, which spread from the Maritimes to Ontario, had utilised repressive legislation to subordinate the indigenous peoples throughout eastern Canada, and was poised to expand westward. Most of the huge territorial treaties which were

subsequently signed were envisioned by the indigenous leadership as a means of formalising ongoing relationships between Europeans and indigenous nations (Dickason 1992: 275); as such, they were viewed as a sacred alliance (Goodstriker 1996: 4). From the European perspective—although such perspectives were never expressed within treaty negotiations—the treaties represented the formal means by which native peoples gave up their title to the land (Treaty 7 Elders et al.: 255, 310). So intense and arrogant was the Canadian nation-building mandate that the entire process of negotiating treaties, from Lake Superior to the Rockies and up to the Arctic, was accomplished in only fifty years.

As treaties were signed, settlers arrived, and native peoples fell further and further back from lines of settlement, the rhetoric which accompanied this process of absolute displacement, starvation and destruction was that of the inevitability of indigenous extinction in the face of "civilisation" (Brantlinger 2003). And indeed, to keep indigenous peoples off their lands forever required two things—an extensive body of punitive laws to maintain subordination over the short term, and for the long term, a concerted set of policies aimed at shattering native peoples' societies, attacking their identities and destroying their cultural cohesion.

In 1876, all existing laws relating to native people were amalgamated into what became known as the "Indian Act", controlling every aspect of Status Indian[5] life. Repressive laws were integrated into it and added almost continuously as a means of social restriction and to facilitate ongoing land theft. For example, any Indian man or woman found intoxicated warranted a month in prison, while an Indian woman found off-reserve could be branded a prostitute, sentenced to upto six months in jail and fined $100 (Jamieson 1978: 43). Other legislation attempted to remove the Indian status of anybody empowered by a university education or who became a professional (Dickason 1992: 284); this later extended to loss of status for serving in the military or for leaving the reserve for work. After the rebellion of 1885, all plains bands were classified as "loyal" or "disloyal", with the cutting of rations to the point of starvation for those declared disloyal and the actual dissolving of certain bands (Stonechild and Waiser 1997: 254–63). Finally, a system of pass laws forbade individuals from leaving their reserves without permission from the local "Indian Agent" (Miller 1989: 191). Other legislations, meanwhile, allowed the government to lease reserve lands without band consent (Dickason 1992: 283), and then later authorised the government to forcibly

[5] Under Canadian law only those indigenous peoples who are recognized as "status Indians" (or as "having Indian status") are federally recognized under the Indian Act. With this federal recognition come certain rights to education, health care, and other rights as guaranteed under the treaties. For over a century, various laws facilitated the removal of Indian status from individuals, so that, at present, there are more indigenous peoples who do not have Indian status than those who do.

move any reserves adjacent to or partly within towns of 8,000 inhabitants or more (ibid.: 323). Constant revisions to the Indian Act made political resistance virtually illegal until 1951(ibid.: 286).

No matter how harsh the regulations, the reality is that restrictive physical control cannot be indefinitely maintained over a subordinated group without escalating levels of repression. It is for this reason that Canada, like most settler nations, began to engage in concerted policies of cultural genocide,[6] to undermine, attack and destroy what was sacred to the indigenous societies whose lands they had seized.

For most traditional indigenous peoples, "the sacred" and "the secular" have been entwined, and so spirituality has been pervasive throughout their societies (Pettipas 1994: 51). To remove people from their land and undermine the power of the women is already to weaken those aspects of community life which provide meaning and balance. To strike at the heart of native societies required two additional processes: the removal of the children who made their life meaningful and outlawing the spiritual practices which would have otherwise enabled communities to resist the collective and personal disintegration caused by profound and traumatic loss.

The removal of children was accomplished by two primary means— through residential schooling and, after the demise of those schools, through the child welfare system. The residential school system, in operation for over a century, was created to effect the total assimilation of native people into the body politic of Canadian society, by removing children from their parents and societies, violently suppressing their language and systematically negating native cultural values (Grant 1996: 23–24), as well as by abusing, humiliating, and in every way attempting to break their spirits. Chrisjohn and Young state unequivocally that the residential schools represented a Holocaust for the native people. It was so in terms of the suffering and, in many cases, the virtual destruction of individuals and of whole communities, and of the cumulative effects of generations of loss of language and knowledge of culture on indigenous nations today (1997: 110).

Hard on the heels of residential schooling came the "sixties scoop", the massive removal of native children from reserve communities already devastated

[6] The original draft of the genocide convention covered the "slow death" measures now termed "cultural genocide", including the forced transfer of children to another human group and the suppression of language, spiritual practices and cultural knowledge. Davis and Zannis have written: "A culture's destruction is not a trifling matter [...] If people suddenly lose their 'prime symbol', the basis of their culture, their lives lose meaning ... A social disorganization often follows such loss, they are often unable to insure their own survival .... The loss and human suffering of those whose culture has been healthy and is suddenly attacked and disintegrated, is incalculable" (Davis and Zannis 1976: 20).

and reeling from the effects of residential schooling. The entire generations of children were taken in care. Within a decade, their proportion surged from less than one per cent to between one-third and one-half of all children in care in some regions. The majority of these children were not adopted, but spent years in foster care, while 70–90 per cent of them grew up in white homes (Dussault et al. 1996, vol. 3: 26) where they were often abused—sexually, mentally and physically. Even when children were placed in "good" homes, they were raised in ignorance of their culture, with no knowledge of their own identity. The statistics from psychiatric hospitals, police records and correctional institutions documents the toll in terms of suicide, substance abuse, youth prostitution, and extreme over-representation in prison.

At the same time as residential schools were being made compulsory, and resistance to the loss of children and policies of community repression was growing, a series of laws were passed prohibiting sacred practices. In an attempt to target native cultural life, in 1884, legislation was introduced into the Indian Act which made it illegal for native people to engage in ceremonial dancing (Backhouse 1999: 65). The prohibition was extended in 1895 to encompass all festivals, dances and ceremonies. This deliberate attempt eroded community solidarity, broke the bonds that unified families and undid the practices which gave the people their identity (Pettipas 1994: 43–61).

This comprehensive legislation remained in place until 1951 and any violation attracted a prison term ranging anywhere from a minimum of two months to a maximum of six months (Backhouse 1999: 66). In the decades that followed, hundreds of Aboriginal leaders, medicine people, dancers and singers across the country were arrested, convicted and jailed for resisting the legislation (ibid.: 100). Meanwhile, empowered by the jailing of powerful leaders and the legal restrictions against ceremonial practises by the legislation, Indian agents and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) were able to openly seize, and then sell, sacred objects, drums, masks, totem poles and other ceremonial items (Crosby 1991; Cole 1985: 249–54). Priests, too, were authorised to invade dwellings on reserves and drive people away from ceremonies.

The legacy of the criminalization of ceremonies and the theft of sacred objects has been profound. It abetted the spread of Christianity, as well as brought about a gradual secularization of community life—as ceremonies that formerly went on for a week were reduced to a weekend's covert activities (Pettipas 1994: 130–37). Inevitably, social cohesion was broken, and the seeds of division were sown between "traditional" native people and those who embraced a European vision of modernity. Inevitably, as well, the entire society became more secular in orientation; the new leaders, in particular, lacked the spiritual knowledge of their predecessors but tended to be individuals who were knowledgeable in business and the accumulation of wealth (ibid.: 225).

In the aftermath of these policies of cultural genocide, many native communities are struggling with absolute social devastation, including alcoholism, family violence, childhood sexual abuse, and utter nihilism in many youths. Most poignantly, as Patricia Monture-Angus describes, these violations all point to colonizers who are now out of reach, who, while hanging on to the lands that are the sources of its wealth, are devolving responsibility to communities in the name of "self-government", so that community members are left with no target for their rage but each other:

> Also notable is the direction in which the disclosures (of childhood sexual abuse) all eventually point. The disclosures unfold in such a way that residential schools, foster care, government and the church are all centrally implicated [...] Where to place your anger is difficult to determine. Residential schools are behind us. Who will carry that anger? Apparatus and individuals of the state are far away and inaccessible. How do you deposit that anger? The perpetrator is a victim too (and may be someone you love) [...]. How do you trust in a criminal justice system that is foreign (colonial) and based on values you do not share? The anger and frustration of Aboriginal individuals and Aboriginal communities swirls and swirls and all too often there is no channel for release. It is a cyclone of pain. (Monture-Angus 1995: 173)

These policies of extreme coercive control and cultural genocide of indigenous peoples are not unique to Canada. In one form or another, all settler nations continually enact legislation that removes people from lands and devastates them with policies to break down communities and destroy cultural knowledge. But examining these processes in Canada provides an opportunity to explore at least one instance of how settler state colonisation "works".

The immediacy of the problem facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada is that the status quo of a colonial order continues to target them for cultural extinction, while continuing to undermine the viability of communities through theft of remaining lands and resources,[7] ironically, often through processes touted as "progressive"—self-government, land claims, and "reconciliation" of past colonial abuses. As Taiaiake Alfred clarifies, this only serves to obscure the reality that Canada's basic policies of assimilation and destruction remain unchanged. The government continues to divest responsibility for the effects of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples, in the name of "self-government", while holding tight to their land base and resources, redefining without reforming, and further entrenching in law and practice the real basis of its power (1999: xiii). Aboriginal people need to re-establish control and jurisdiction as *nations*—which means that they need significant access to more land, juridical autonomy and the right to set their own policies for education, health care, social care and language regeneration. Most profoundly, Canada's pretence that the sovereignty

[7] At present, all existing Indian reserves in Canada combined are still less than the acreage of one-half of the Navajo reservation in Arizona (St. Germain 2001).

of the "Crown" be upheld over every inch of territory, that is now Canada, needs to give way to a reality of shared and distinct jurisdictions. Some form of federation involving both indigenous and non-indigenous territories, a kind of Canadian federation, could probably emerge from a genuine decolonization process. This entails a total re-thinking of Canada, where sovereignty/self-determination is treated as fundamental to indigenous survival.

How Postcolonial Theory Has Failed to Address Indigeneity

Given the history of indigenous devastation, appropriation and resistance that characterizes settler state colonialism, we would expect that postcolonial theorists writing in the context of the Americas would centre indigeneity in their explorations of colonialism and postcoloniality, especially in exploring the limits of the term in the given context. However, a close examination of key Western postcolonial theorists illustrates that they not only fail to seriously take on the continuing ways in which indigenous peoples are colonized, but often exclude any reference to indigeneity altogether. As we shall suggest in this section, the consequences of such exclusion is profound. Firstly, by failing to address indigeneity, these theorists ignore settler state colonialism, and thus offer a partial and distorted exploration of colonialism, racism and postcoloniality—a view that separates racism from colonialism and privileges analysis of racism and transnationality over that of ongoing colonization. Secondly, by erasing indigeneity, this body of work effectively endorses the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples. Thirdly, as a result of this exclusion, Aboriginal people cannot see themselves in or through the perspectives of postcolonial theorizing, leading Aboriginal scholars to make a number of important critiques of postcolonial theorists.

Postcolonial scholars have offered powerful explanations of the ways in which race, racism and diasporas have shaped certain aspects of the histories and social relations in the United States and Canada. This broad set of writings yields four central insights. First, projects of colonialism were constructed through an ontological understanding of differences that shaped both Europe's understanding of itself and also its understanding of the "rest" (Said 1978; Hall 1996b). Second, with the "end of colonisation" (notably as defined in the part of the world we know as the South, rather than settler state colonization as in the Americas), there has not been an end to the discourses and politics of race and racism. As postcolonial scholars have adeptly illustrated, contemporary social relations remained premised on notions of racial difference (Hall 1996a; Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1999). Third, nationalist projects are implicated in racialized and gendered exclusionary practices, and as a result, the exclusion of those racialized as outsiders has been an intrinsic feature of many nationalisms (for examples, see Balibar 1991; Goldberg 1997; Yuval-Davis 1997). Finally,

a number of postcolonial theorists suggest that the histories of colonialism and decolonization need to be understood through the histories of movement and migration. Especially in the context of white settler societies, such as the United States and Canada, the focus of postcolonial scholars has been to illustrate the ways in which the regulation of migration and citizenship have been fundamental to the creation of a white settler projects, racialised spaces, and national identities (Lowe 1996; Braziel and Mannur 2005).

This body of work richly illustrates the ways in which colonial and nationalist projects, and their attendant politics of race, gender and sexuality, construct notions of racialized insider/outsider patterns of exclusion and have differentially positioned "people of colour" and women within contemporary nation-states. But it tells us little of the ways in which these same discourses of "race" and nation have come to be framed through the historic and ongoing colonization of indigenous peoples. Notably, the omission of indigeneity is located in the focus that postcolonial theorists have placed on the histories and contemporary manifestations of racism. As McClintock, Mufti and Shohat note, "much of 'postcolonial theory' can be seen as an attempt to come to terms with its own location [...]. It should therefore not be surprising that the migrant as a social type figures prominently in so much contemporary criticism, as subject and object of critical practice and as metaphors of displacement, the terrors, the stubborn survivals that characterise social life under late capitalism" (1997: 8). Indeed, as we shall illustrate, the focus on the figure of the migrant leads many postcolonial theorists to erase the presence of indigenous peoples in North America, ignoring settler state colonialism and marginalizing indigenous struggles for decolonization.

In this section, through crucial examples drawn from key postcolonial writers, we will illustrate the ways in which such an exclusionary focus on racism leads postcolonial theories to overlook the realities of ongoing colonization. We will elaborate on this argument by exploring five areas where postcolonial theorists have failed to make indigenous presence and ongoing colonization foundational: first, through the very use of the term "postcolonial"; second, through an analysis of racism that fails to integrate indigenous presence and realities; third, through the analysis of migration and diaspora that fails to recognize that diasporic identities are situated in multiple projects of colonization and settlement on indigenous lands; fourth, through the way in which a focus of racism against people of colour has erased the fact that they are also settlers, though in a liminal space within the white settler project; and finally, through the multiple theories premised on diaspora that are irrelevant, or in some cases actually harmful, to indigenous peoples—notably concerning the emphasis on hybridity, the notion that viable indigenous epistemologies no longer exist, the lack of attention to issues relating to the land and the manner

in which theories of nationalism contribute to the ongoing de-legitimization of indigenous nationhood.

The first tension between postcolonial theory and Indigeneity arises from the term itself. Given the current situation of settler states still claiming sovereignty over indigenous lands, it is highly problematic to refer to indigenous peoples in settler states as "postcolonial" as it ignores and erases their presence and their colonized condition within the discourse. Notably, the reliance on the concept of "postcolonial" leads many postcolonial theorists to embark upon their theoretical positions from the premise that colonialism is something that existed in the past and is restructured in the present as "postcolonial". Take for example, Stuart Hall's essay *The West and the Rest*, which has been important in introducing a postcolonial approach to "race", racialised identities and racism. In commenting on the last of five phases of European expansion, Hall defines "the present, when much of the world is economically dependent on the West, even when formally independent and decolonized" (1996b: 191). There is a surprising lack of any mention of the parts of the world that have not been decolonized. Given that colonialism is an ongoing process, and that indigenous peoples in settler states are denied sovereignty, a body of knowledge premised on the notion that the present is characterized by formal independence is not just inaccurate, it is also a distortion of an explanation of the present. It equally importantly erases the presence of indigenous peoples. As a result, indigenous peoples, particularly in the Americas, become relegated to a mythic pre-colonial past, whereby their contemporary existence and their struggles for decolonisation are erased from view and thereby denied legitimacy.

We are not the first to point out that "colonialism" has not ended. Scholars have struggled with the label "postcolonial" since its inception.[8] But much of the discussion has focussed on the ambiguities of this terminology in reference to places that were previous colonised. As McClintock (1992) pointed out, given the forms of economic and political dependency in the global order, it is not clear whether once-colonised countries can be seen as properly "postcolonial". Similarly, Shohat (1992: 103) asks "when exactly, then, does the 'postcolonial' begin?" Thus, in an early attempt to define the terrain, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) note in their "Introduction" to *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*:

> . . . that the field has become so heterogeneous . . . [and is] divided between those who believe that 'postcolonial' refers only to the period after the colonies became independent and those who argue, as the editors of this book would,

[8] It is important to note that we will be referring to a vast body of literature—often categorized as critical race theory, postcolonial theory and theories of nationalism. There are clearly a number of different approaches within these bodies of theories. As our purpose is to illustrate that these diverse bodies of thought share crucial ontological underpinnings, a detailed discussion on the differences is beyond the scope of this chapter.

> that it is best used to designate the totalities of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterize the societies of the postcolonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism did not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode to be active in many societies. (1995: xv)

Notably, a handful of scholars have obliquely noted the limitations of the label when it comes to white settler societies. For example, Shohat (1992) notes that:

> [. . .] the politics of decolonisation in parts of Latin America, North America, Australia, South Africa where white settlers formed their own independent nations is different from the dynamics of those societies where Indigenous populations overthrew their European masters. As a result, the term is not adequate in defining contemporary realities in the once colonised countries.

Similarly, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin state,

> The effects of imperialism occur in many different kinds of societies including those 'settler/invader' societies in which postcolonial contestation is just as strong and just as ambivalently engaged as it is in more obviously decolonising states and regions.[9] (1995: 3)

Given the recognition of the limits of the term "postcoloniality" in the context of white settler societies, it is surprising that these theorists do not examine the way in which the field of postcolonialism overlooks indigenous presence and the fact that postcoloniality is not a reality for indigenous peoples in North America. It is also problematic that these writers equate indigenous struggles to decolonize *from* the settler state with the struggles by racialized migrant peoples for equality *within* the settler state. For example, McClintock, Mufti and Shohat suggest that postcolonial theory allows for creating "bridges between communities of recent immigrants to this country (from Asia, Africa, and Latin America), relatively 'new' communities of militant identification (such as gays, lesbians and bisexuals), and 'older' communities of struggle, in particular, Native American, African American and Chicano/a" (1997: 6). As a result, decolonisation struggles become one component of a larger anti-racist struggle. Such pluralism, while utopian in intent, marginalizes decolonization

[9] Notably, Frankenberg and Mani (1992) have proposed the term "post civil-rights" to overcome the limits of the term postcolonial. As they state, "Let us emphasize that we use the term 'post-Civil Rights' broadly to refer to the impact of struggles by African Americans, American Indian, La Raza, and Asian-American communities," which, they argue, collectively produce "a 'great transformation' of racial awareness, racial meaning, racial subjectivity" (ibid.: 480–81). While we commend the attempt to include indigeneity, our fear is that the term "post-civil rights" obscures the fact that the societies that we are addressing are ones in which indigenous peoples are denied the most basic civil right—the right to self-determination.

struggles and continues to obscure the complex ways in which people of colour have participated in projects of settlement (as will be illustrated later in this chapter). Such a pluralistic framework reflects the ways in which an analysis of racism, separated from, and privileged over, an analysis of settler state colonisation among Western postcolonial theorists. This obscures not only our abilities to recognise ongoing indigenous colonisation, but also our understandings of racism, racial subjectivities and anti-racism.

Indeed, a detailed examination of postcolonial theorists does illustrate that the absence of an analysis of ongoing colonisation does lead to a distorted understanding of the histories of race and racism. We would like to offer two key examples. First, let us go back to the example of Hall's essay *The West and the Rest*. As we suggested before, the failure to address the ongoing colonization of indigenous peoples in the Americas not only erases these struggles from history, but as importantly, such erasure does not allow for an exploration of how the ongoing colonisation of indigenous peoples shapes contemporary modes of "race" and racism in settler nations (including those in the Caribbean where people of African and Asian descent have established political authority). Rather, the relationship between colonialism and the articulation of "race" is limited to the ways in which the colonial past is rearticulated in the present.

Consider the very different manner in which indigenous peoples write about racism articulated as part of colonialism. A good example is the autobiographical essay by Cree-Métis scholar Emma LaRoque:

> I was born into a wave that has haunted my heart and influenced my research and understanding of the human being as the oppressed and as the oppressor. The late 1940s to the 1960s was the tidal wave of the town—in which, like the headlights of a car in the night coming closer and closer, the town loomed larger and larger. It was not just one town; it could be any town, anywhere in Canada. Town consisted of 'white' people who spoke English with various accents: French, Anglo-Saxon, Ukrainian, Syrian, Chinese. To us, they were all white and they owned and ran everything. Restaurants. Stores. Offices. Schools. Churches. Hospitals. Rooming houses. Barrooms. Jails. And even the very corners of the streets we walked on. In Cree, we called them ooh-gu-mow-wuk (the governing ones) . . . Town brought disease. Throughout the first half of this century, thousands of Native people were felled by tuberculosis. My community did not escape. People with advanced TB were shipped off to Edmonton, and often their bodies were shipped back. We had no money. We spoke no English. Edmonton may as well have been Russia, it was that inaccessible to us .... By the time I was ten years old, I had lost more relatives and neighbors than an average white person will lose in a lifetime. (LaRoque 1997: 365–66)

As LaRoque's writing highlights, from an indigenous perspective, racism is a central aspect of colonialism; it cannot be abstracted away from a colonial context. Indeed, writing that takes place in a colonial context inevitably locates racism as a central means through which colonialism is maintained. Fanon

articulated this in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging or not belonging to a given race, a given species" (Fanon 1963: 32).

Another example of the erasure of colonialism from analyses of race and racism can be seen in analyses of slavery in the United States. Postcolonial theorists such as Paul Gilroy and James Clifford have emphasized the ways in which the enslavement of Africans has shaped European discourses of modernity, European identity and contemporary articulations of racism. As Toni Morrison states, "modern life begins with slavery" (cited in Gilroy 1993: 308). We do not contest the significance of slavery, but we wonder about the claim that modernity began with slavery, given the importance of colonialism and Orientalism in constructing Europe's sense of itself as modern (see Said 1972). To proclaim that modernity began with slavery, rather than with the genocide and colonization of indigenous peoples in the Americas that preceded it, erases indigenous presence. The vision that emerges is of racism beginning with the bringing of African peoples as slaves to what became the United States of America and Canada. By erasing the indigenous presence we miss an understanding of the powerful roles that indigenous nations in the southeast played in resisting the establishment, on their traditional territories, of plantation society and its concomitant African slavery.

We also cannot see how the anti-slavery movement was premised on continuing modes of colonization of indigenous peoples. For example, how do we account for the fact that the same week President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, he also approved the order for the largest mass hanging in the US history, of 38 Dakota men accused of participating in an uprising in Minnesota (Cook-Lynn 1996: 63)? Such events suggest connections between the anti-slavery movement, the ongoing theft of indigenous land, and the forced relocation or extermination of its original inhabitants.

Similarly, we can see the ways in which a focus on postcolonial subjects/racism and the omission of indigenous presence distort analyses of diasporas. McClintock, Mufti and Shohat point out that "postcolonial diasporic writings take as their starting point the cultural consequences of the worldwide movements and dislocations of people that have characterised the development of mass-mediated 'global' or 'transnational' capitalism" (1997: 5). However, rarely do analyses of worldwide movements include the way in which the movements of peoples associated with these projects of global capitalism contribute to the ongoing colonisation of indigenous peoples. Take for example, a recent definition of diaspora offered by Braziel and Mannur: "[D]iaspora can perhaps be seen as a naming of the Other ... historically ... referred to [as] displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through its movements of migration, immigration, or

exile .... Diaspora suggests a dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and a relocation in one or more nation-states, territories or countries" (2005: 1).

Similar to other kinds of postcolonial inquiry, much of the theorising on diaspora is based on the premise that formal colonization has ended. For example, Braziel and Mannur in their "Introduction" to *Theorising Diaspora*, assume a periodization for migration that posits the world as decolonized by the twentieth-first century. Thus, they speak of "the massive migrations that have defined this century—from the late colonial period through the decolonisation era early into the twentieth century" (2005: 3). Again, all of the scarce references to indigenous peoples and their colonization are linked to the past, indigenous peoples are suggested as no longer existing. For example, Stuart Hall in his explorations of how migration has constructed the Caribbean, refers to the "'erased presence' through decimation and genocide of the Arawak, the Carib and other indigenous Amerindians" (1994: 8). While it is important to point to historical genocide and decimation, erasing the *current* presence of indigenous peoples, and their contemporary social relations to African and Indian Guyanese erases the tensions posed by decolonization projects within these nation-states. In addition, in defining and exploring the emergence of diasporas in the Americas, most theorists fail to ask, let alone explore, the ways in which these movements of people have been articulated through the colonization of Aboriginal peoples, or the ways in which the project of appropriating land shaped the practices of migration and settlement. Take, for example, the discussion on black loyalists of Nova Scotia by historians informed by critical race and postcolonial theories. The black loyalists, according to them, were either denied land promised to them, or were awarded barren ones, which the whites did not want (Hill 1981: 10; 63–64; Walcott 1997: 35–36; Mensah 2002: 46). Many of the black settlers of Nova Scotia, ex-slaves with few options, eventually left for Sierra Leone (Mensah 2002: 47). The historians point to the importance of this history for understanding the subsequent racialisation of geographies in Canada, and the ways in which it shaped the emergence of a "Black Atlantic". However, to speak of the loss of black land rights without referencing those whose lives were being destroyed to "free up" the land for settlement was to be complicit in erasing genocide. Ignoring the reality that indigenous peoples were being forced off their lands that black loyalists were struggling to settle on, not only erases a particularly bloody interval of genocide in Canadian history, but also fails to explore how in the Americas, migration and diasporas are always constructed on indigenous lands, and through the repression of indigenous peoples.

Rather than exploring such connections, much of the focus of scholars interested in diasporas has been to explore the way in which migrants destabilise notions of "home" and "away". As Brah (1996) suggests, the home

is a myth of belonging, that place and time outside place and time, that is constituted through away—its opposite—exile, the outside, elsewhere. As diasporic subjects are constituted by practices of cultural, social and economic exclusion within the nation-states in which they reside, which define them as outsiders or as inauthentic citizens, "home" becomes doubly meaningful. A number of postcolonial scholars have pointed out that this "doubleness" leads diasporic subjects to destabilise relationships of power. Such subjects are seen as challenging the narratives of nation on which dominant versions of national identity and collective belonging are based (Mercer 1998; Bhabha 2004). In addition, since diasporic subjects are seen as transgressing boundaries demarcating nation and diaspora, they are seen as "hybrid". For many theorists this hybridity allows for a subjectivity that is liminal, where identity can be renegotiated. The limitation of such analyses of diaspora is that these theorists fail to ask, let alone explore, the ways in which negotiations of identity, while challenging the naturalness of the white settler state, are downplaying their own role as settlers, however liminal, on indigenous lands.

There are a number of ways in which this takes place. Take for example the way in which South Asian male migrants in the early twentieth century, in challenging discourses and practices of whiteness and nation, deployed a parallel discourse in which they referred to themselves as colonists and defined their project in Canada as one of constructing an Indian colony (see Dua 2002). Other groups, such as Japanese Canadians and Jewish Canadians, also deployed the discourse of colonization to situate themselves within a white settler formation (for Jewish Canadians, see *Canadian Jewish Alliance, Annual Report*, 1917; for Japanese Canadians, see *Winnipeg Free Standard*, June 1916: 1). These examples point to the complex ways in which migrants' challenges of racism led to the emergence of identities that contributed to the ongoing colonisation of indigenous peoples.

Nor is this process limited to the past. The ways in which the Canadian government continues to appropriate Aboriginal peoples' remaining territories means that the tensions between migrants as settlers and indigenous decolonisation continue even today. A recent Supreme Court decision, *Delgamuukw*,[10] which addressed the nature of Aboriginal title to lands, clearly indicated that Aboriginal rights can be abrogated to enable "the settlement

[10] The original case involved the claim by the Gitksan and Wetsowe'ten Houses to ownership and jurisdiction over the entire 58,000 square kilometres of their traditional land base in central British Columbia (BC). Their tireless attempt to have elders address the courts on their own terms, using oral traditions as "proof", was summarily dismissed by the BC court. When the case was appealed to the Supreme Court, however; the court decision, without actually addressing Gitksan/Wetsowe'ten self-government, defined Aboriginal title simply as the right to exclusive use and occupancy of the land rather than outright political control (Mainville 2001: 32).

of foreign populations" to support the goals of the general economic development of British Columbia.[11] As the reality of ongoing land disputes illustrates, people of colour live on land that is appropriated and contested, where Canada continues to deny indigenous peoples' nationhood, and their access to their own land. These examples also point to the need for a more complex understanding of the place of people of colour in settler societies, of diasporic subjects, identities and citizenship. However, as we have illustrated, postcolonial writings of the histories of the settlement of people of colour have been framed only by reference to the racist exclusionary policies and overlook the ways in which migrants' settlement has taken place on indigenous land.[12]

This brings us to the multiple ways in which postcolonial theories premised on diaspora are irrelevant, or in some instances actually harmful, to indigenous peoples. These include postcolonial theorists addressing hybridity, nationalism, and the viability of precolonial knowledge. More broadly, it speaks of the need for postcolonial theory that is premised on relationship to land.

From indigenous perspectives, the emphasis on hybridity within postcolonial theory is particularly troubling. A number of indigenous theorists (Weaver, Womack and Warrior 2006; Cook-Lynn 1998; Deloria 1998; Womack 1999; Womack 1997) have questioned the usefulness of this concept—and the hazards of utilising it—in relation to indigenous peoples. There are two ways in which the term is used which are problematic in indigenous contexts. The first, more common in critical race theory, addresses the notion of hybridity related to racial identity, to being mixed-race, in ways that advocate an embracing of border identities, liminality, and a rejection of "essentialised" notions of identity. The second, coming from an emphasis on diaspora, relates to the notion of *cultural* hybridity.

[11] Part of the Delgamuukw decision dealt with the test of justification for the Infringements of Aboriginal Title. The text of the decision reads as follows: "Constitutionally recognized Aboriginal rights are not absolute and may be infringed by the federal and provincial governments if the infringement (1) furthers a compelling and substantial legislative objective and (2) is consistent with the special fiduciary relationship between the Crown and the Aboriginal peoples. The development of agriculture, forestry, mining and hydroelectric power, the general economic development of the interior of British Columbia, protection of the environment or endangered species, and the building of infrastructure and the settlement of foreign populations to support those aims, are objectives consistent with this purpose (authors' emphases)" [Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010].

[12] While important differences exist between those who were brought as slaves, those who currently work as migrant labourers, those who are refugees without legal documentation, or those who are émigrés who have obtained citizenship, important similarities also exist. People of colour live on land that is appropriated and contested, whereas indigenous peoples are denied nationhood and access to their own lands.

Given the reality of identity regulation, which is codified in law in Canada and the United States and is practised informally in other settler states, any celebration of hybridity as mixed-bloodedness is highly problematic for indigenous peoples. Almost overwhelmingly, in settler states, indigeneity has been maintained by colonizers as a "pure product" that ceases to exist with too much racial mixing (Lawrence 2004; Garroutte 2003; Sturm 2002). Moreover, because of identity regulation, indigenous peoples struggle with the racial categories maintained and enforced by settler governments—between "pure-blood" and "mixed-blood", between "status Indian" and "Métis". "Hybridity", as a concept, has no charm for those who have been forcibly removed from their communities as "mixed-bloods"; indeed, because of contemporary limitations on passing Indian status onwards, racial hybridity signifies losing Indian status—the federal government's formal recognition of "Indian-ness". In such a context, to embrace hybridity is to risk embracing one's own extinction as a native person.

The second use of "hybridity"—the notion of cultural hybridity— closely related to the concepts of diaspora, is in many respects even more problematic for indigenous peoples. Held firmly in the grip of settler-state colonialism for the past 500 years, they have had little room to challenge certain foundational racist myths that bind indigeneity firmly to notions of primordiality, in contradistinction to modernity, so that indigenous peoples are not allowed to change and still remain indigenous. This is particularly the case with respect to law, where in both Canada and the United States, "too much" cultural hybridity can affect an individual's ability to assert Aboriginal title, and can interfere with their ability to practise Aboriginal harvesting rights (Monet and Skanu'u 1992; Palmater 2000). Native people who are revealed as transgressing the boundaries of so-called authenticity—for possessing too much modernity—are inevitably dismissed as fakes.

On another level entirely, "too much" cultural hybridity is assumed to disqualify entire indigenous cultures from having a national identity. Jace Weaver, Robert Warrior and Craig Womack, in their most recent work (2006) have strenuously argued the validity of tribe-specific literary criticism—in face of strong opposition from those who see most Native American cultures as "too hybrid" because they have a written literature (much of it in English), a Christian tradition and a diasporic existence. Clearly, the ways in which notions of hybridity are taken up relative to indigenous peoples result in the denial of nationhood.

This leads us to the ways in which postcolonial approaches to nationalism conflict with indigenous realities. As McClintock, Mufti and Shohat state:

> One of the central contributions of postcolonial theorists has been the deconstruction of the nationalist claim—'the people as one'—as a double structure of representation that fuses together the semiotic and the political,

> erasing any sign and memory of its own production. In this sense, the cluster of concerns denoted by 'the postcolonial', and the positions(s) they collectively signify, may perhaps be thought of as also post-nationalist. (1997: 9)

However, a post-nationalist position renders indigenous nationhood unviable, which poses a number of serious ramifications for struggles for indigenous sovereignty.

First, surprisingly, postcolonial scholarship on white settler nationalism has not focussed on the ways in which settler nationalism is premised on the denial of indigenous sovereignty. Rather, the focus has been to illustrate the ways in which the politics of whiteness has led to racism against migrants. In this respect, postcolonial deconstructions of nationalism appear to be premised on what Cree scholar Lorraine Le Camp calls "terranullism", the erasure of an ongoing post-contact indigenous presence (Le Camp 1995). As a result, postcolonial deconstructions of settler-nations rarely address the struggles for sovereignty.

Second, the universal dismissal of the ways in which projects of nationalism employ notions of collectivities to construct notions of national identity denies indigenous peoples the possibility of a viable framework from which to work towards sovereignty after centuries of continuous engulfment by the most powerful colonial order in the world, and their continuous erasure, starting with Columbus, from international political relations (Venne 1998). Representing nationalist projects as only technologies of violence that are based on the reification of essentialised categories (McClintock 1997) not only fails to speak to those who are without "nation", but, as importantly, fails to acknowledge the many sophisticated engagements with thinking about sovereignty offered by indigenous scholars.

In Canada, for example, indigenous scholars have begun challenging the automatic equation of the concept of "nationhood" with European modernity and the nation-state, insisting that within indigenous epistemologies, one can speak of "nationhood" as well as "peoplehood". Lina Sunseri, for example, uses Oneida oral tradition to assert anOneida nationalism unconnected with notions of the nation-state (Sunseri 2005). Sakej Henderson, meanwhile, in an extensive exploration of Mi'kmaq oral tradition, has documented the seventeenth century concordat between the Mi'kmaq Grand Council and the Holy Roman Empire, as marked by the wampum belt currently maintained at the Vatican; the centralisation of nationhood power vested in the *Mawio'mi* that resulted from the concordat, and yet the maintenance of decentralised local control throughout. He has also written extensively about the larger geopolitical organisation of the east coast nations in Canada and the northeastern United States that existed prior to military suppression—the Wabanaki Confederacy—and its relationship to other indigenous confederacies of the time (1997).

Finally, John Borrows clearly articulates Anishnabe oral tradition as the means through which Anishinabe customary law was maintained (2002: 3–28).

Through the work of these and other theorists, we can see that concepts of indigenous nationhood in Canada reflect carefully traced, researched and recollected information about indigenous orders of governance; information which is viable and accurate and being reclaimed after its forcible suppression by British or Canadian colonialism. And yet, postcolonial theorists routinely overlook the epistemologies and ontologies of indigenous nations. As a result, postcolonial theory becomes the only framework through which indigenous decolonisation struggles can be analysed. In the process, such theorists flatten the distinctions among indigenous peoples, dismissing the complex indigenous histories that are currently being reclaimed, and positing indigenous nationhood as always only "imagined". In profound ways, such routine deconstructing of indigenous nationhood contributes to "re-primitivising" indigenous peoples.

Postcolonial writers have noted that Marxism has worked to undermine indigenous assertions of sovereignty. As McClintock, Mufti and Shohat state:

> The struggles of Indigenous peoples force us also to re-examine the alliance between Marxism and Third World nationalisms vis-à-vis Indigenous 'Fourth World' peoples, whose subsistence economies have formed structuring absence in that alliance, one that masked the possibility of an Indigenous critique of both the First World's colonial relationship to Native Americans and of similar practices preformed by the Third World independent nation-states. (1997: 9)

What we would ask for is that postcolonial writers engage in a similar critique of postcolonial writings on nationalism. Our fear is that without such a self-reflective approach, the emphasis on a "post-nation" will further the denationalization of those, who for centuries have been targeted for physical and cultural extermination.

When postcolonial theorists overlook the epistemologies and ontologies of indigenous nations, it is frequently linked to an implicit, and sometimes explicit, notion that colonialism has effectively destroyed all pre-colonial knowledge. While such theorising may address the shattering effects of diaspora, it does not encompass the totality of indigenous peoples' realities. Indigenous epistemologies have inevitably been affected by colonialism (a fact which many communities are struggling with). Nevertheless, in every community, traditional elders are crucial for cultural survival. Through their knowledge of indigenous languages, their cultural grounding in the spiritual life and traditional skills of their communities, and their lived awareness of both the suffering and strength of indigenous communities, many elders maintain, despite ongoing colonial oppression, epistemological frameworks that are still distinct from Western knowledge. Yet this knowledge is devalued and stifled in the larger society, not only through a history of violent colonial suppression,

but through the everyday hegemony of Western knowledge systems including, for indigenous writers, Western postcolonial theorists! Maori writer Linda Tuhiwai Smith has described the numerous ways in which Western knowledge has been used to subjugate and distort the knowledge systems of, and degrade the humanity of indigenous peoples (Smith 1999: 19–41). Quechuan theorist Sandy Grande, meanwhile, describes how in everyday life, Western education enforces as universal and normative such notions as independence (over cooperation), individual achievement and competitiveness (over collective well-being), secular humanism (over spirituality) as well as detachment from sources of local and personal knowledge and detachment from nature (Grande 2004: 70–71), all of which violate indigenous notions of the self in relation to community and the earth. Tewa educator, Gregory Cajete, has explored how Western scientific knowledge is fundamentally hierarchical, and how its notions of non-reciprocal causality—that there is only one way to view nature scientifically—violate notions of reciprocal causality, of mutual relatedness between all things in the natural world, which underpin most indigenous knowledge frameworks (Cajete 1999: 76).

Cherokee theorist Eva Marie Garroute has observed that, within academia, indigenous epistemologies are allowed into scholarly discourses only if they are severely pared down and sanitised of the spiritual elements pervading the models that gave them birth. The sanitising process typically means one of two things: either indigenous knowledge is presented as a set of "primitive beliefs" that have been superseded by contemporary "factual knowledge", or it is reconstructed as *symbolically* rather than *literally* truthful. The first strategy portrays indigenous knowledge claims as simply wrong (although very interesting), while the second strategy allows them to be right only by denying that traditional people mean what they say (Garroute 2003: 103). At present, there is little place for indigenous knowledge—for its usage of the spiritual, its embeddedness in knowledge of land and language, and its indifference to deconstruction—within postcolonial discourse.

In many respects, the difficulties that indigenous peoples have with postcolonial discourse relates to there being little place in it for land-based peoples. Chadwick Allen articulates this very clearly below:

> Indigenous minority discourse poses a problem for those postcolonial theories that delegate 'essentialism', 'nativism', 'nationalism' and so forth as anachronistic politics, because Indigenous minority discourses often emphasize land and treaty rights and because they often insist on persistent racial, cultural, and linguistic distinctiveness despite other changes over time. They provoke charges of a retrograde 'essentialism' in particular, because orthodox postcolonial critics often fail to understand how the discourses that intersect with the controversial blood/land/memory complex, including the discourses of treaties, might appear cogent for Indigenous activists and writers. (Allen 2002: 30–31)

Cherokee theologian Jace Weaver asserted that until postcolonial theory takes seriously both the collective character of native traditional life and the importance of specific lands to the cultural identities of different native peoples, they will have little meaning for native peoples (Weaver 1998: 20–21).

Conclusion

As we have shown, postcolonial theory addressing the Americas systematically erases indigenous people and decolonization from the construction of knowledge about "race", racism, racial subjectivities, and anti-racism. We have argued that such erasure has profound consequences. It distorts our understanding of "race" and racism, disconnecting "race" from "colonialism" in a manner that is quite artificial. It distorts our understanding of the relationships that people of colour have with multiple projects of settlement. It posits people of colour as innocent[13] in the colonization of Aboriginal peoples and, therefore, does not address the ways in which people of colour in settler formations are also settlers on lands that have been stolen.

As a result, indigenous theorists writing from positions of settler state colonisation, are fairly sceptical about the value of Western postcolonial theory for addressing indigeneity. Not only has it not spoken to indigenous realities, it further undermines indigenous existence and struggles. We would therefore like to caution those who are theorising indigeneity internationally, not to assume a compatibility between indigenous thought and postcolonial theory. Below, we will articulate some of the lessons that we have learned from the experiences of indigenous peoples in settler states with respect to postcoloniality.

Firstly, there is a need to carefully examine the relationship of indigenous peoples to nationalism. We cannot assume that indigenous nationalist projects are incompatible with struggles for justice. While postcolonial scholars are correct in pointing out that postcolonial nationalist projects in the global South have worked to undermine indigenous survival, viability and resistance that does not imply that indigenous struggles for justice should exclude exploration of indigenous nations. Clearly, indigenous peoples are being sacrificed by local elites as expendable in terms of resource development, like the Borneo and Arang Asli peoples in Malaysia (Endicott 2003: 156), the Khanty people in northern

[13] Sherene Razack has theorized that a critical way in which power relations can be ignored is when individuals assume that they can stand outside of hierarchical social relations, and therefore are innocent of complicity in structures of domination. She has also noted that individuals are often involved in a "race to innocence", where they emphasize only their own subordination and disregard how they may simultaneously be complicit in other systems of domination. When we disregard how systems of oppression interlock, it is relatively easy to focus on our own oppression and disregard where we are privileged over others (Razack 2004:10, 14).

Siberia (Balzer 2003: 125), or the Ogoni people in Nigeria (Di Stefano 2006); or they have been viewed as extraneous or "counterrevolutionary" to liberation struggles, like the Kung San peoples of Angola (Lee 2003: 87). Postcolonial states often maintain modernist assumptions about the "primitive" nature of indigenous peoples. At one level, this leads to designations of "scheduled tribes", as in India, frequently utilising the same colonial framework developed by the British (Rathod 2000); at the most extreme level, indigenous peoples may be targeted for genocide, as the people of East Timor are facing with Indonesia (Anderson 2003: 174). However, the extent to which indigenous peoples in postcolonial states need to be decolonized is a matter that needs careful consideration.

Secondly, the key concepts that come out of postcolonial theorizing around questions of identity and postcoloniality may not be valid for indigenous peoples. For example, we wonder if Gramsci's concept of subaltern, is an effective way of theorising the experience of tribal peoples in postcolonial states? Does it allow for an exploration of tribal peoples' relationship to landor to the postcolonial nation-state? Does it allow for an exploration of tribal peoples' relationship to other groups within and outside the nation? Similarly, does postcolonial theorising of identity resonate with the histories of tribal groups? We would ask, very tentatively, if subsuming tribal peoples under the broad rubric of "subaltern", allows for a thorough exploration of indigenous identities, epistemologies, and spirituality. We wonder to what extent postcolonial writers in the context of the global South engage with issues of relationship to land. As a result, we would point to the need for a thorough interrogation of the key concepts and arguments put forward by postcolonial theorists writing in the Global South to ensure that these concepts do not undermine indigenous struggles and resistance.

Thirdly, coming from settler states, where a powerful body of indigenous theory has developed which speaks about the issues which are important to their own communities, we have been troubled by the extent to which the voices of indigenous peoples in postcolonial states do not appear to be foregrounded in analyses of indigeneity. We have discovered that when indigenous peoples speak with their own voices, powerful and highly relevant new knowledge is manifested.

Finally, what we would suggest is that similar interrogations as what we have engaged with in the North American contexts need to take place within postcolonial theory in a variety of regional and local contexts.

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2

Endangered Indigenous Traditions of the Urhobo People of the Niger Delta*

GODINI G. DARAH
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

This chapter is a modest contribution to the efforts by the Urhobo people and other minority nations of the Niger Delta of Nigeria to confront a history of injustice and restore their national identity and sovereignty.

It has three broad sections. The first section provides a socio-geographical description of the Urhobo people and their place within the matrix of Nigeria's plural nations and multilingual and multicultural setting. The next section examines the various forms of endangered indigenous traditions and knowledge sites, while the final section deals with various political and artistic strategies adopted by the Urhobo and their neighbours in the Niger Delta region to safeguard their traditions and symbols of nationhood.

THE URHOBO: A BRIEF PROFILE

The Urhobo are the most populous ethnic group or nation in the western Niger Delta region of West Africa or the Gulf of Guinea. The term "Urhobo" refers to the group as well as the language. With a population of about two million (2002 Census), the Urhobo people constitute nearly half of the total population of Delta State, where, besides Pidgin English, six autonomous languages are spoken. Urhobo is one of the 402 languages spoken in Nigeria; about 100 of these are spoken in the Niger Delta alone. The territory of the Urhobo, about 5,000 square kilometres, is located in the tropical rainforest

* This chapter has gained impetus from the initiative of the BRPC in India to encourage the exchange of ideas and strategies on how to re-interpret the experiences of nations and peoples who have been pushed to the margins of history by the globalization process fostered by colonialism and imperialism.

plains between the Benin River in the west and the Niger River in the east. The area is about 50 km north of the Atlantic coast and is accessible by sea, land and air.

Jeffrey A. Sayer et al. (1992: 26–27) have described the West African rainforests as that territory that extends "along the coastal region of West Africa, from Senegal in the west to Togo in the east. They are separated from the Central African rainforests by the Dahomey Gap in Benin, where savanna extends to the coast. They are less extensive than the Central African forests and support fewer species. . . ." The authors go on to give statistics of the flora and fauna that characterise the region. The Urhobo lands in the western Niger Delta belong to this geographical zone.

The Urhobo area has been host to numerous external influences over the centuries, a feature which has put considerable pressure on its indigenous institutions and culture. For example, British colonial education has been dominant in the area for over a century. The first preaching of the Bible in Urhobo land was in 1841, at Okwagbe on the Forcados tributary of the River Niger, while the Christian religion has had converts for the past 150 years. The evangelical mission was led by Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a freed Nigerian slave who later became the first Black Bishop of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

The Urhobo area currently hosts two government universities, one private university and three polytechnics, one technical institution, and one college of education. There are about 400 oil wells, an oil refinery and a petrochemical plant. There is one natural gas processing facility (the largest in Sub-Saharan Africa), two major electricity turbines and extensive oil and gas pipelines. This territory is the heartland of the energy belt of West Africa. Detailed historical and sociological studies on the Urhobo have been done by Obaro Ikime (1969) Onigu Otite (2003), Perkins Foss (2004) and Peter P. Ekeh (2005, 2006).

The fate of the Urhobo is implicated in that of the wider context of the Niger Delta, the largest delta in Africa and the second largest in the world (Egborge 2000). There are twenty-one main rivers in the lower Niger Delta, which empty themselves into the Atlantic Ocean. These rivers along with its tributaries, distributories and creeks nurture a delicate ecosystem, which harbours a very rich biodiversity.

The Niger Delta is Nigeria's economic powerhouse as it contains all the oil and gas resources. They account for 95 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. There are thousands of oil wells and nearly 200 gas flare sites across the region. The land, rivers and waterways are crisscrossed by 6,000 km of oil and gas pipelines, the laying of which has consumed vast tracts of precious forests, water courses, flora and fauna. The World Bank resource audit of 1995 showed that the Niger Delta had over 200 species of fish, reservoirs of forests and agricultural lands (Anderson et al. 2005). Eight of Nigeria's nine

seaports are in the Niger Delta, the economic importance of which to the country is comparable to that of the Nile to Egypt.

Urhobo territory is in the economic epicentre of the Niger Delta. Besides oil, the area is endowed with about one-third of all the natural gas reserves in Nigeria. From the early sixteenth century, Urhobo land has been a provider of numerous raw materials and human cargo that fed the Trans-Atlantic trade of the period. The natural endowment of these lands has led to reckless plunder by foreign and local exploiters for half a millennium. During the immediate post-Trans Atlantic Slave Trade era in the nineteenth century, the Urhobo were the major producers of the commodities of international trade, including palm produce, piassava, and lumber. These were exported via the Urhobo ports of Sapele, Warri, Okpare and Ganagana.

Whereas the Urhobo people have been major contributors to the economic sustenance of Nigeria for nearly a century, access to political power in the country is manipulated in such a way that the Urhobo are structurally handicapped in aspiring for political leadership. The politics of marginalisation, as it affects the entire Niger Delta region, is well treated by Ambily Etekpe (2007).

A federal arrangement introduced in Nigeria in 1954 was intended by the British colonial government to expand autonomy for the so-called minority nations at independence in 1960 and beyond. This system served well the multinational Nigerian situation from 1954 to 1966. The Urhobo and other minority peoples of the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt regions had comparably equitable political representation at the time. Unfortunately, the federal system was demolished by the military dictators who ruled the country from 1966 to 1999. The absence of federal and democratic openness has inhibited the growth of Urhobo indigenous institutions and made the people more vulnerable to negative external influences. We will now turn to the manifestations of this endangerment.

Forms of Endangered Indigenous Traditions

The Slave Trade/African Holocaust

The most systematic destruction of Urhobo indigenous traditions was initiated by the first contacts with imperialist Western Europe in the early sixteenth century. This was when the Portuguese inaugurated their settlement and began plundering territories along the West African coast. One Portuguese explorer, Duarte Pacheco Pereira, mentioned Urhobo (spelled Subou) in his travel diaries compiled between 1505 and 1508. Peter Ekeh (2006:77) has shown that the reference to Urhobo was made at page 129 of Fereira's book, *Emeraldo De Situ Orbis*, translated and edited by George H. T. Kimble (1937). Ekeh observes that the "exact period of Fereira's voyage would appear to be unknown but

it is believed that his book was written between 1505 and 1508". From the sixteenth century on, the Portuguese became very active in the exploitation of resources in West Africa, including slaves. Other European nations such as Spain, Holland, France, England, Germany, Italy and Belgium were involved in the lucrative West African trade from the sixteenth to twentieth century. The Urhobo territory was affected by the entry of these colonising and aggressive European nations.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade in West Africa lasted for about 300 years (1450–1830). Millions of Africans were shipped to the slaving nations in Europe and the Americas. A large proportion of this number came from the Niger Delta and Urhobo territory. The wars and raids organised to obtain the slaves caused serious de-population and forced migrations. As I observed:

> Who knows how many artisans were wasted in the wars and raids? How centres of enterprise and markets were destroyed? Those killed, captured or enslaved could have included talented story tellers, historians, composers, singers, dancers, costume designers, and organisers of festival and ritual events.... (2005b: 8)

This slave trade was formally ended in the 1830s. Trade in forest resources was resumed thereafter. The European imperialist nations had to conquer and colonize the African nations in order to control the commodity trade. This led to the period of direct colonialism that occurred from the late nineteenth century and lasted up to the 1960s. Thus, for West Africa in general and the Urhobo in particular, the period of exploitation and political control by foreigners lasted for centuries. Peter Ekeh et al. (1989: 5) show the length of this ordeal and its unquantifiable negative consequences. This is how they describe the twin problems of slave trade and colonialism:

> Slave Trade and colonialism have exercised powerful influences in the shaping of the central parameters of African history and culture. Between them, the Slave Trade era and the era of colonialism, share much of the events of modern Africa. Starting in about 1050 A.D. with the Muslim trans-Saharan and trans-Indian Ocean trade, and continuing with the European Transatlantic exploits which started about 1450 and dragged on until about 1850, the Slave Trade ravaged Black Africa for well over eight centuries. . . .

The Urhobo and the Niger Delta area suffered immeasurable loss of sources of indigenous traditions and knowledge with the forceful transportation of millions of skilled personnel and culture bearers. There are no detailed studies on the effect of slave trade and colonialism on the culture and arts of the Urhobo. However, the resilience of elements of African culture in the African diaspora is indicative of the damage done to every language group. For example, a tradition of ancient Urhobo masquerade performance has been identified in the former Dutch colony of Suriname in Central America.

The Colonial Era

The endangerment of indigenous traditions and knowledge was very pronounced during the decades of direct colonial rule. There is a rich corpus of literature on the subject for Africa and the various cultural regions. Among the authoritative works are Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961/1980) and Cheikh Anta Diop's *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology* (1991). The European colonial enterprise in Africa was justified with the imperialist mythology that Africans had no cultural value. With this fallacious thesis, colonial plunderers proceeded to demolish whatever they perceived as an obstacle to their rule by force.

In the case of the Urhobo, most of their indigenous traditions and institutions were demonised by the British as primitive and barbaric so much so that the name "Urhobo"—the very symbol of the people's national identity—was mutilated. Pereira, who first refered to Urhobo, but wrongly mentioned it as "Subou" (1505), is said to have got this version from their neighbours—Benin or Itsekiri —who have difficulty with the "rh" diacritic. Other European records used "Sobo" for the Urhobo people. This error was to haunt Urhobo identity for over 400 years until 1938 when the Urhobo Progress Union compelled the British colonial authorities to effect a correction. Till now, 47 years after Nigeria's independence from colonial rule, some neighbouring peoples of the Urhobo still apply the stereotype "Sobo" to refer to the group.

The names of several Urhobo settlements were wrongly spelt by the British colonial officers and these errors have remained in official records to this day. Examples are "Sapele" for Urhiapele, "Agbassa" for Agbarha, "Abraka" for Avwraka, "Kokori" for Uhwokori and "Jesse" for "Idjerhe". The most contentious of these instances is the name "Warri", which the British coined in 1891 for the new, tri-ethnic township built on lands owned by the Urhobo, Ijaw and Itsekiri language groups. This name has been a subject of litigation and communal dispute for nearly a century.

The most adored Urhobo nationalist of the 1930s and 1940s is known to history as "Mukoro Mowoe". He represented the entire western Niger Delta in Parliaments until his death in 1948. Yet, his real name was "Mukoro Oghenemohwo". Probably due to their impatience with Urhobo names, the British shortened and dismembered "Oghenemohwo" to "Mowoe". And this is the name the family bears till date.

The British onslaught against Urhobo traditional and indigenous religions was very high-handed. The foreign Christian missions did not recognize the ideological autonomy of Urhobo indigenous belief systems, dismissing all of them as "pagan" and "heathen" modes of worship. In the violent process of converting Urhobo natives to Christian monotheism, shrines, sanctuaries, temples and other objects of worship were destroyed. Festivals and artistic

pageants associated with these institutions were either banned or discriminated against.

In the process, the indigenous traditions of morality and spiritual uprightness fostered by these institutions either slackened or were abandoned altogether. The religious wars of attrition weakened Urhobo indigenous resources of resistance against foreign domination. Samuel Erivwo (Peter Ekeh 2005: 194–226) has provided a detailed analysis of the traditional religions and their philosophical foundation of moral purity and good society.

Ever so resourceful, the Urhobo sought alternative ways to express their belief in monotheism. Some of them founded indigenous charismatic religious movements which attracted more followers than the imported Christian churches. One of these was the *Igbe* movement originated by Ubiesha Etakpo of Kokori in the late nineteenth century. The British saw this as an attempt to set up a rival system of order and ideological control. The members of *Igbe* were persecuted and driven to frustration with litigation in order to expand the field for Christian churches. A detailed treatment of this matter is available in M. Y. Nabofa's "Igbe Ubiesha: An Indigenous Charismatic Movement of the Urhobo People" (ibid.: 300–71).

Urhobo nationalism reached its peak during the anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria between 1940 and 1960. Some Urhobo Christian clerics endeavoured to incorporate indigenous thought and liturgy into Christian worship. The founder of the God's Kingdom Society (GKS), the late Saint Gideon Urhobo (formerly Ukoli of Agbarha-Warri), integrated Urhobo cultural elements into his new movement. Its early followers were permitted to practise polygamy. Traditional and folk Urhobo dance and musical styles were used to promote evangelical work. These strategies were successful; thus the GKS, with its world headquarters in Warri, is one of the well-organized African churches with followers in west Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Fundamentalist Evangelical Missions

However, the upsurge of Pentecostal fanaticism in Nigeria since the 1980s has put Urhobo indigenous traditions and folklore under intense neo-colonial pressure. These new business like Christian organizations are structured and managed like their counterparts in the USA. The Pentecostal variant of Christianity, like the *Sharia* movement in Islam, is very intolerant of indigenous cultural practice. Their clergy associates every Urhobo religious event with witchcraft and Satan. The urban poor and middle-class elite that patronise these churches seem to derive psychological relief from being promised emancipation from problems such as poverty, premature death and diabolical attacks suspected to emanate from relations and envious neighbours.

The leading Pentecostal churches undertake periodic conversion crusades to the rural Urhobo settlements during which those "who give their lives to Christ" are required to destroy folk art works and ritual objects that have Urhobo civilizational value. During the crusades, new converts may be induced to identify "satanic" elements which allegedly cause economic backwardness of the community in question. Invariably, these "evil" agents are Urhobo institutions, sacred groves, and ecological sites that symbolize important religious myths. Whenever such sites or plants are pointed out, young people take immediate steps to destroy and eliminate them. In these "spiritual cleansing exercises", bad government policies and destructive activities of multinational oil companies are never identified among the "satanic" forces.

The suppression of indigenous institutions by the State and the_church has its roots in the colonial era. During World War II, a bout of economic depression and hardship had always been succeeded by a rise in the number of fundamentalist expressions of intolerant Christian movements in the Urhobo area. The Jehovah's Witnesses Sect, especially, took advantage of the capitalist Great Depression of the time to intensify its pressure on people to abandon earthly pursuits.

There was a solar eclipse in 1947. The Jehovah's Witnesses Sect concluded that this was signal of the end of the world as has been predicted in the Bible. Many people, deceived by these false prophecies, set fire to their shrines and other emblems of traditional religion and medicinal practice. Some destroyed or disposed of their material possessions leading to an incalculable amount of loss of Urhobo indigenous culture.

In the years immediately following Nigeria's independence in 1960, there was another period of disillusionment owing to the failure of the national government to meet the great expectations of the masses of the people. In the Urhobo area, an indigenous anti-witchcraft movement developed. The leader, Okpe of Ugbisi in Udu district, claimed to have spiritual power to rescue victims from bewitchment. When Okpe died a few years later, the group withered away.

Often poverty in the land was attributed to the evil of witches and wizards who were believed to have necromantic power to destroy others' wealth or auspicious opportunities. From 1962 to 1967, the movement spread like wildfire in the dry season. Those who were alleged to be witches and wizards had their instruments of traditional worship destroyed by burning. People who wanted to be associated with the new movement volunteered to quit indigenous modes of religious worship and had their paraphernalia of worship either burnt or thrown into rivers.

The association of poverty with witchcraft and evil has become a feature of Urhobo popular belief and ontology. There is ambiguity in the ways the belief is expressed. Sometimes, those who are materially wretched are suspected to

have built up their fortunes in the metaphysical world of witchcraft. Even those who are doing well in socio-economic terms can be accused of having used evil powers to divert opportunities of others to themselves.

The Urhobo part of the Niger Delta is particularly gripped by the mania of extremist religious expression because there are a good number of urban centres for evangelical crusading. The mushrooming of places of worship is indicative of the level of socio-economic pressure on the urban poor. In a preliminary survey I conducted in the Warri-Effurun twin oil cities of Delta State in 2006, there were about 350 new church establishments. The bulk of the membership of the churches is made up of female worshippers, suggesting that women bear more of the brunt of hardship and social unease that comes with underdevelopment.

Languages and Linguicide

Language is another field where Urhobo indigenous traditions have suffered huge losses. In the Urhobo language was not taught in the British school system. Children who spoke Urhobo in class or during school hours were penalised for speaking "vernacular" (as if English was not a vernacular!). Students were compelled to speak and write only in English. This constituted a major threat to the development of Urhobo language, both in its spoken and written forms. Macaulay Mowarin's essay, "Language Endangerment in Urhoboland" (Ekeh 2005: 523–33), has examined the ramifications of the problem of *linguicide* or death of languages in Africa owing to the colonial situation:

> In Africa, the endangerment of indigenous languages is one of the retrogressive efforts of colonialism. African languages are going into extinction due to the belief of Africans in the inferiority of their indigenous languages and the superiority of former colonial languages. African languages are marginalised because Africans believe that their languages are not socially and economically useful to them. (525)

Mowarin applies his thesis to Urhobo and observes that the pre-eminence accorded to English is one of the causes of the endangerment of Urhobo. In his words, "English is Nigeria's official language. Nigerians have a positive attitude towards the language while they have a negative attitude towards their indigenous languages." He adds, "most elites from Urhobo now transmit only English language to their children as the first language in their homes. Such children have now experienced language loss … in Urhobo culture" (527).

The loss of competence in language is the most serious factor in the endangerment of Urhobo indigenous traditions. Language is the bedrock of national identity and survival. Without a language, a people will remain anonymous in the global community. This point is underlined by Luisa Maffi in the discussion of linguistic diversity in Darrel Addison Posey, *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity* (1999: 21)

> Through the verbalisation process ... we learn much of our culture's ethics. Together with the words for objects and phenomena, we learn our culture's connotations, associations, emotions and value judgements. The definition of eco-social world, including group identity, status and world view, is ... realized through language.

Maffi in her article in *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity* observes, "the smaller languages of the world are under threat due to ever-growing assimilation pressures that promote incorporation into 'mainstream' society and the collective abandonment of the native languages in favour of acquired majority languages ..." (ibid.: 24).

Since language is the key to the hearts and minds of a people, losing it could mean obliterating the culture and civilisation fostered by that language. With the loss of language systems of knowledge creation, storage and retrieval are all endangered. This danger is already imminent in the linguistic ecology of the Niger Delta where Pidgin English or Creole variants have displaced native languages. For the Urhobo people, this process portends grave terror for their children, for they will be unable to appreciate and transmit the Urhobo world view and civilisation.

The threats to Urhobo oral and intangible cultural heritage can be appreciated more by considering Jan Vansina's definition of culture. In his *Oral Tradition as History* (1985), Vansina describes culture:

> ... as what is common in the minds of a given group or people; it refers to a community of society. People in a community share many ideas, values, and images, in short, representations which are collective to them and differ from others ... Such cultural contents are transmitted to children in the process of learning how to behave. Communication of oral tradition is part of the process of establishing collective representation. (Ibid.: 124)

Endangered Biodiversity and Indigenous Traditions

The disasters recorded in the area of forests and environments are even more horrendous. As a rainforest people, the Urhobo have developed their worldview, economic systems and social life from environmental resources. The damage to the environment has caused eco-social disequilibrium. In Nigeria, forest losses are due to reckless exploitation, bush fires and erosion. G. O. Otegbeye and A. E. Onyeanusi estimate that the annual rate of deforestation in Nigeria between 1980 and 1990 was about 3.5 per cent (Ivbijaro et al. 2006). In their view, large-scale deforestation in the south of Nigeria (including Urhobo territory) particularly "in the lowland forest areas, has resulted in a number of other problems including flooding, sheet, and gully erosion, as well as siltation [*sic*] of rivers that sometimes constitute the only source of water for domestic use" (ibid.: 126).

Presently, only about 4 per cent of Nigeria's prime forest cover is intact. The forests harbour not only plants of economic value, they are sanctuaries of species with aesthetic, religious and spiritual significance. The destruction of species habitats undermines the philosophical foundation of existence for those whose livelihoods are obtained from forests. For these people, the forests are a vital source of knowledge, sacred sites and rituals that form essential features of their heritage.

Otegbeye and Onyeanusi have drawn our attention to how due to "deforestation, the fallow environments where medicinal plants are collected are disappearing, and in extreme cases they have completely disappeared especially in the arid and semiarid lands." "As they are being overexploited", they fear that "knowledge about their properties and uses may be lost while new uses to which they can be put are not being determined" (ibid.: 131). The loss of habitat is endangering the source of herbal medicine.

The findings reported above are supported by the views of scholars working on forest-dependent peoples such as are found in the Congo River in Central Africa.[1]

The most serious threats to biodiversity in Urhobo territory are the oil industry and its allied activities. The search for oil and construction of support facilities eliminate numerous species endemic to the land. Since the 1950s, when crude oil and gas were discovered in the area, there has been a considerable amount of loss of biodiversity. Besides, frequent incidents of oil pipeline fires are reported, thereby destroying biological life. Human casualties have also been very high. For example, a burst oil pipe fire in October 1998 in the Idjerhe section of Urhobo resulted in about 1,000 deaths, mostly of women and children. Oil spillages happen almost daily in the Niger Delta. Seepage from them contaminates soil and water courses. Precious species are destroyed. These environmental disasters affect indigenous traditions in the fields of medicine, agriculture, rituals, arts and festivals. There are many reports on the environmental impact of oil in the Niger Delta, containing copious information on the irreparable losses of biodiversity, including in parts of Urhobo.

Strategies of Response to Endangerment

Over the millennia, the Urhobo have devised strategies of response to the assault on their culture and national identity. During the era of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, many Urhobo settlements organized collective defence mechanisms to escape forcible capture or to reduce the impact of the slave raids on the demography and economy. Some of these stratagems included the establishment of military and paramilitary squads to provide common defence and security for vulnerable groups such as women and children. These armed

[1] See for example, Wolvekamp (1999) and Newing (2005).

militias would organize surveillance programmes that offered escape tips to individuals and groups.

Perkins Foss (2004: 59–69) has provided useful information on the development of the cult of *Iphri*, which trained its members in military and metaphysical skills to protect themselves against being captured by slave raiders. The *Iphri* totem was owned by individual members who offered periodic sacrifice to it to enhance its potency. Another *Iphri* totem or emblem owned by the entire community was kept in the house of a curator. Benediction was given to it whenever the need arose and an annual festival was held for its votaries who were usually all able-bodied members of the given community. The Ughievwen group of Urhobo coined the slogan *Omo Ughievwen, omo ufo* ("Every Ughievwen free born is immune from slavery") to celebrate the efficacy of their collective instruments of defence. To this day, the statement has become a common slogan which the Ughievwen proudly promote as an identity marker.

The horror of the slave trade is so ingrained in Urhobo national consciousness that any reference to being enslaved or reduced to the status of servitude is considered to be a grave abomination. To avoid association with this lowly status, the body of every Urhobo who died in battle is always brought home for interment, because to be buried in a foreign land is tantamount to being a slave. This practice was extended to cover female members of any community married into another. Whenever the married woman dies, the body must be brought home for burial. A family that is unable to do so, bears the opprobrium of having surrendered the remains of one of its members to the eternal disgrace of slavery or servitude. The image of such a person is that of *ijopha*, that is, a lost captive.

In the vast field of environment and ecology, the Urhobo have developed elaborate systems of conservation and preservation. Land tenure is one area where this has been achieved. Farms and cultivated spaces belong to individuals or families who initially tamed the forests during the founding of communities. These types of lands can only be alienated following strict procedures conducted according to traditional laws and practices. The land tenure in respect of communal lands and natural resources gives proprietorship to the entire community or settlement. Such resources are natural forests, waterways, rivers, wetlands, beaches, natural fish ponds, oil and raffia palms, lumber and other forest plants.

The institution of sacred and forbidden (i.e., "protected") forests is one system of conservation. There are strict regulations for the exploitation of resources in these sites. Rare species of flora and fauna are protected in this way in order to ensure the survival of endemic plants and objects. Until recently when mass poverty resulted in reckless plunder, no one was permitted to

harvest these sanctuaries for private use. To certify such spaces as sacred shrines or temples of worship were always located in their precincts.

One good illustration of the traditional conservation system is the institution of "edjokpa" by palm-produce workers. This was a sacred oil palm tree identified and venerated by all who were engaged in the palm-produce industry. Onigu Otite (2002) has provided a profile of the "edjokpa" as replicated in the Ikale area of Yoruba land where Urhobo immigrant palm workers have plied their trade since the late nineteenth century. Otite observes that the cult "...was represented by a palm tree, especially the one with peculiar features in the trunk or leaves ... Members of a camp were motivated to pay their contributions (for the worship) by the fear that if they failed, they would fall from an oil palm ..." (83–84).

Ancestor Veneration

In the era of aggressive Christian evangelism and British colonialism, the Urhobo deployed the resources of historical remembrance to renew and strengthen their culture. One of the most viable Urhobo institutions of memory or oral archiving is that of ancestor veneration. Known as *ese-ego/ini-ego*, these memorial events were marked with festivities and artistic performances on an annual basis. In the Ughievwen and Udu divisions, where the institution was very well developed, ancestor veneration feasts came at the peak of the rainy season when work schedules were most relaxed.

During the week, each family would gather to offer a sacrifice of sumptuous meals to the departed members. The names of the ancestors were recalled and solicited for protection and assistance for the living from the world of the dead. These rituals helped families to rekindle bonds, discuss general welfare and settle disputes. The week of feasting usually concluded with performances of classical dances and songs such as *udje*.[2]

Political Strategies

In the face of the various onslaughts against their culture and national identity, the Urhobo have also taken brave political steps to safeguard their sovereignty and national pride. During the early phases of British colonial rule, the Urhobo mounted fierce resistance to programmes of marginalization. The grouping of some Urhobo divisions with those of Itsekiri in the 1920s ignited an era of radical nationalism in defence of Urhobo autonomy and cultural identity. Owing to such stout opposition, the British discontinued the experiment.

In 1927, the Urhobo joined forces with the Itsekiri, Ijaw, Isoko and Ukwuani to resist the imposition of head tax_or poll tax to raise more revenue from the Warri Province. The tax was interpreted by the colonized people of the

[2] Ojaide (2003) and Darah (2005a) have done extensive work on this.

Province as an additional burden on the groups, which were at the time being exploited through inequitable pricing of commodities such as palm-produce and timber. At the time when the tax was introduced, the area had had three decades of oppressive colonial policies, including wars to repress resistance to British imperial expansion. The tax policy rekindled militant anti-colonial sentiments which culminated in a mass uprising against the British and their institutions and agents of government. All the five indigenous nations in the Province took an oath to boycott all forms of commercial transactions with the British and their European allies. Armed troops were deployed by the British to quell the rebellion. The revolutionary leader of the anti-tax movement was Oshue Ogbiyerin of Orhunghworun in Udu district of Urhobo. The British were compelled to suspend the unfair policy.

The season of heightened anti-colonial consciousness enabled the Urhobo people to take other bold measures to safeguard their national identity. For example, in 1931, the Urhobo people founded the Urhobo Progress Union as a political platform to combat colonial marginalization and oppression. The organisation, which still exists, is one of the oldest indigenous formations in Africa, after the African National Congress of South Africa founded in 1912.

The Weapon of Education and Music

Although the Urhobo were connected to western European nations from the sixteenth century, European-type education did not take roots in the Urhobo area until the first decade of the twentieth century. The first primary schools were opened in Sapele and Warri in 1902 and 1903 respectively. The earliest secondary schools came up in the late 1940s, and helped in the expansion of literacy in the early 1950s. However, the Urhobo took an early advantage of the facilities of scribal culture to record their history and transmit the culture in various ways. Some books of the Bible were translated into Urhobo in the 1920s.

The Urhobo Progress Union, the apex political association of all Urhobo divisions, promoted writing and reading of Urhobo language. With this technology of culture, the Urhobo took measures to convey their own worldview and values in written formats. Between 1950s and 1960s, teaching Urhobo was made compulsory in primary schools in the Urhobo areas. News in Urhobo featured on Nigeria's national radio since the 1960s. The College of Education in Warri ran an Urhobo programme since the 1980s and this language is now a degree programme at the Delta State University, Abraka.

Music and song-poetry offered the Urhobo ample space to express their resistance to unwholesome foreign and local influences. For them, music and dance are veritable public media for the ventilation of public opinion and reinforcement of cherished values. For example, Darah observes, "... songs usually provide more reliable evidence of the various ways Urhobo people

have responded to the rupture of their material and super-structural situations due to the influence of colonialism" (Darah in Gugelberger 1985: 179).

The satirical genres of Urhobo song-poetry are appreciated by the general public because they serve the purpose of exposing evil and anti-social behaviour for the perceived good of the community. This art of periodic "poetic cleansing" was a potent weapon for checking deviant acts and encouraging people to uphold the moral precepts of the society. Commenting on the *udje* tradition of songs, Darah (2005a: 21) notes that the "... spirit that animates satire is that of criticism, a criticism vigorous enough to make culpable actions and injustices appear reprehensible and repulsive. It is this attitude of censure that informs all satirical song-poetry in Urhobo."

Ojaide (2003) has underscored this element in his characterisation of *udje* songs, to wit, that "... the songs strongly assail what the traditional society regards as vices: laziness, vanity, wretchedness, miserliness, flirtation, adultery, prostitution, wickedness, and greed". Furthermore, Ojaide points out, "... the songs are very relevant today as societies everywhere continue to fashion means of dealing and coping with their lesser crimes and protecting their ethical and moral values. In fact, their relevance transcends cultural and historical contexts. The songs serve as a lesson to today's journalists and publishers of tabloids" (2003: 4–5).

Threats to and negative pressures on Urhobo traditions and culture are central themes in most Urhobo song-poetry practice. The colonial regimes and their symbols of authority were subjects of attack and jeer in some of the songs from the 1930s. Darah explains that poets in the classical tradition of Urhobo music "always displayed an attitude of protest to the white man and his culture" and that "colonialism was portrayed as a cultural pestilence" (Gugelberger 1985: 186).

In the article under reference, there are song fragments that depict how colonialism was viewed by the oral artists. One of these says, "The white man has ruined the world/Every haloed custom has lost value." Another criticizes the process of colonial modernization thus: "The white man improved the world to a point/And left it tottering/Left it in a precarious position". The songs containing these lines were performed at various festivals in the 1940s—a time when British colonialism in Nigeria was at its peak.

Sadly, these robust traditions of song-poetry and moral reform began to decline when the economy of colonial capitalism fostered migrations from the rural to urban centres of Nigeria. The men and women who were the tradition-bearers no longer found fulfilment and material reward in the practice of the verbal arts. The colonial legal system and courts viewed the songs of censure as threats to public order and individual freedom. Ideological extremists in the imported churches railed against indigenous arts and practices in general.

I recall how the leader of our local Catholic church in my village, Esaba, in the late 1950s, upbraided us for participating in song concerts to gratify the devil, by which he meant concerts of songs of abuse directed at social deviants. My generation of newly-baptized converts had to abandon involvement in these civic affairs for fear that we might be marked for hell-fire if we persisted.

Over the decades since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the temper of Urhobo popular songs has changed a great deal, with emphasis now on panegyric lays, which bring financial dividend to the artists. Yet, even within the moral constraint arising from this self-censorship, the truly gifted musicians still find space in their songs to chastise behaviour that they think constitutes a serious threat to the values that are dear to the Urhobo as a people.

The idiom of censure employed by the contemporary popular musicians is not as corrosive as that of classical *udje* songs. Direct names are no longer mentioned in the songs attacking unwholesome acts; rather, general allusions and innuendos are employed. However, despite the mildness of the temper, it is true that Urhobo popular musicians are active in the oral discourse of using songs to uphold the cherished ethos of good conduct and community spirit. Urhobo politicians who ignore these normative values are potential targets of exposure in song.

Extolling the spirit of Urhobo solidarity and nationalism is one of the areas where the musicians have contributed to the safeguarding of Urhobo culture and indigenous traditions. The leading maestros of Urhobo music in the past three decades are Omokomoko Osokpa, Ogute Ottan, J. C. Ogbiniki, J. Adama, Gometi Oyibo, Juju/Udjabo, and Johnson Adjan. Others are America Djalere, Okpa Arhibo, Nathaniel Oruma, Lucky Okwe, Onorume Toro and Lady Rose Okirighwo.

Each one of these musicians and entertainers has several popular albums based on themes that celebrate Urhobo solidarity and national aspirations. The songs focus on contemporary issues of national politics, the marginalization of Urhobo and other linguistic minorities, the struggle for equity and justice in resource distribution, particularly the exploitation of the Niger Delta oil and gas endowments. The patriotic sentiments expressed in the songs endear them to the patrons of their music. Thus music partakes in the overall politics of protection of endangered Urhobo cultural assets and national identity.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

As the experience of the Urhobo of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria shows, scholars and culture workers urgently need to collaborate to safeguard the indigenous traditions of various peoples of the world from threats of globalization of finance capital. The challenge that faces us in this era of postcolonial reconstruction was clearly outlined by the pioneer President of

Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Amílcar Cabral in his seminal essay, "National Liberation and Culture". Let me conclude by quoting the relevant paragraph:

> A people who free themselves from foreign domination will be free culturally only if, without complexes and without underestimating the importance of positive accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment, and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture (1973).

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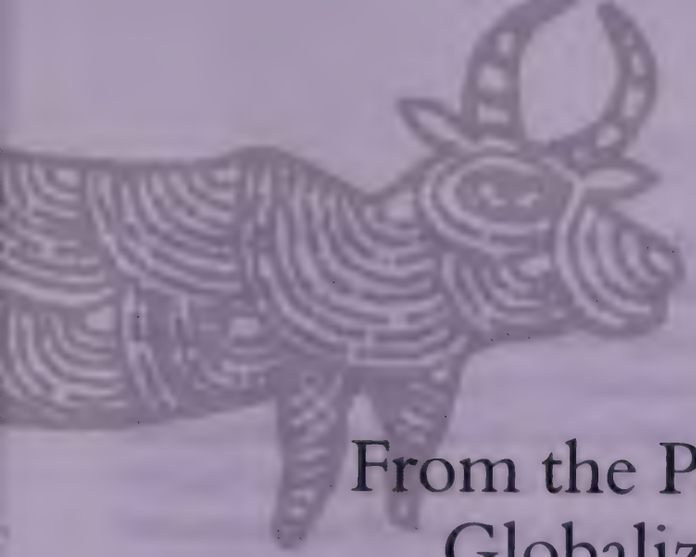

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From the Postcolonial to the Globalized Language

Revitalization in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Éire/Ireland*

Muiris Ó Laoire
Institute of Technology, Tralee, Ireland

Introduction

Both the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland and the Māori language (hereafter referred to as Māori or *Te Reo Māori*) in Aotearoa/New Zealand have survived near-extinction following centuries of colonization by the same colonial power. The impact of colonization[1] in both the nations was characterised by loss of land, loss of sovereignty and loss of cultural identity and well-being (Glynn et al. 2008). In both the situations, a similar type of language planning was used with the education system being harnessed to impose English on the development of curriculum and pedagogies. In both the

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1 It must be noted that some historians and social commentators counter the conception of Irish history in colonial terms, comparing the Irish situation more to that of other European peripheral nations dominated by powerful neighbours. They also point to the fact that nationalists rarely identified their situation with that of other non-European colonised peoples in Asia, Africa and elsewhere, using a discourse and political language derived from their European counterparts (Cleary 2007). It is only recently that comparisons with subaltern indigenous peoples elsewhere are being forged to point to commonalities in language shift, cultural loss and postcolonial cultural mixings.

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countries, the intergenerational effects of a massive abandonment of language during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continue to be felt and efforts at restoring both Irish and Māori are ongoing. In Ireland there remain only three *Gaeltacht* (Irish language speech community) regions, where the Irish language is spoken as a first language (L1) within the local communities, and in Aotearoa/New Zealand there remain only a very few (rural) tribal regions where Māori is spoken. While Ireland has existed as a politically autonomous nation since 1922, the Māoris in New Zealand continue to struggle to achieve autonomy and independence promised within the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), but which is even now vigorously contested by the State (Glynn et al. 2008). Despite this difference, both Irish and Māori people have been engaged over the past decades in numerous initiatives to secure language revitalization, seen as an essential starting point for restoring cultural identity.

Having survived, rather than being revived therefore, languages like Māori and Irish also continue to confront the threats of globalization, signalled to hasten the disappearance of minority and indigenous languages across the globe. In Ireland and Aotearoa/New Zealand as elsewhere, powerful waves of global liberal capitalism threaten the cultural landscape and have increased a cultural homogenization dominated by Western consumerist imperatives. In Ireland, for example, membership of the European Union (EU) and a rapidly changing demography have diminished the intensity of contestation on the linguistic constituent of Irish identity. Here, as in Aotearoa/New Zealand, questions of and issues around language have been accommodated within the broad political discourse of minority rights in an increasingly pluralist society.

Even though there are remarkable similarities in the history of language shift, language loss and in planning for language revitalization, there are, nonetheless, unique relevant historical, economic, societal and geopolitical factors in operation in both the countries. This chapter discusses the commonalities in the language revitalization narrative of both countries and considers contemporary challenges that globalization poses to both minority languages. It draws on emerging research in language revitalization studies that identifies a commonality of factors or a complex interplay of variables shared by most communities endeavouring to revitalize language in the tense but creative chasm between postcolonialism and globalization.

Language loss in Eire/Ireland and in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Irish

Irish belongs to the Celtic branch of the Indo-European family and is estimated to have been brought to Ireland between 500 and 300 BCE by the invading Celts (Ó Siadhail 1989: 1). Subsequently, the language extended through the

processes of colonisation to Scotland and to the Isle of Man. By the mid-eleventh century, it was the primary language of Ireland and Scotland, with both regions sharing a common tradition of literacy and learning. In Scotland, the language began to decline and contract from the end of the eleventh century onwards (Ó Murchú 1988: 79), although the Irish-speaking areas of Ireland and Scotland continued to share a standardised literary language until the seventeenth century (Ó Laoire 2008a). The language endured its first decline in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as a result of colonisation by the Anglo-Normans. While some language shift to French and English occurred in Ireland (Risk 1968; Picard 2003), the Anglo-Norman linguistic impact was at first absorbed and a predominantly Irish-speaking Ireland emerged with its cultural traditions remaining distinctive and viable until the Tudor conquest of Ireland in 1603. This conquest led to the dispossession of the native aristocracy and to the demise of native social, political and cultural institutions. From that period, the decline of Irish from majority to minority status can be delineated. Following the demise of the native cultural institutions, the gradual Anglicisation of the Irish-speaking middle classes followed and was completed largely by end of the eighteenth century (Wall 1969). Education played a pivotal role in the Anglicisation process. The new primary school system introduced in 1831 had the aim to produce "good law-abiding British subjects" and the entire curriculum was mediated through English. There was a great increase in the number of school-going children and knowledge of English spread accordingly (ibid.: 87).

Although the demise of the language was well underway before the mid--nineteenth century, the economic collapse led to a decimation of the Irish-speaking masses by sustained emigration and by death from famine in 1845–48. The famine was most severe in the western and poorer regions, with its impact greatest among the Irish-speaking communities with over a million deaths recorded during the period 1845 to 1855, the majority being native speakers (Wall 1969). Massive emigration among native speakers ensued and by the late eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a very rapid abandonment of the language by the remaining poorer classes in rural areas (Ó Murchú 1988).

The shift to English was particularly rapid in the decades following the Famine (Nic Craith 1994), with the percentage of monoglot Irish speakers decreasing from 12.66 in 1851 to 3.47 by 1891. The post-famine percentages predominantly represent the size of the Irish speech community to this day. The retreat of the speech community to a scattering of separate areas (*Gaeltachtaí*) around the western seaboard was already determined in these figures.

Ironically, while the nineteenth century witnessed a sustained shift to English as the favoured language of communication, the status of Irish was gradually being restored in international linguistic scholarship, which stressed

the language's significance as a part of the European linguistic and cultural tradition. Its position within the Indo-European family of languages was being researched and published, and old-Irish and middle-Irish texts were becoming available in printed form. At the end of the nineteenth century, these academic developments partially merged with a growing language maintenance movement, which reflected the growing cultural nationalism elsewhere in Europe (Ó Laoire 1999). In 1893, the Gaelic League (*Conradh na Gaeilge*) was founded to become a most effective force for the maintenance and promotion of the Irish language. As well as gaining recognition for the language in the education system and for matriculation purposes, it popularised the ideal of Irish revival, establishing a network of Irish language classes throughout the country. As a result of the League's ideology, Irish was designated "the national language" in the constitution of the new State in 1922, when competence in the language was stipulated for admission to the civil service, police (*Gardaí*) and army. In short, Ireland had tried to deal with its language loss by re-establishing the then minority language as the language of the State. Romaine (2008:17) refers to the way that Ireland acted as a model for other emerging nations in this regard: "... Ireland set a course that was to be followed by a number of newly independent nations of the twentieth century such as India, Tanzania and Malaysia, where shifting from the coloniser's language to the local vernacular(s) was seen as fundamental for building a new nation out of a former colony".

Te reo Māori (The Māori language)

The ancestors of the New Zealand Māoris migrated to the country from East Polynesia between 700 and 1000 A.D. (Sutton 1994). After a few centuries of isolation, the varieties of East Polynesian brought by them evolved into a single language known as (New Zealand) Māori. When Cook first arrived in New Zealand in 1769, the number of Māoris on both islands was estimated to be below 100,000 (Pool 1991). In the following decades a number of Māoris learned some English by travelling on European ships, which were visiting New Zealand to hunt seals and whales and from Europeans living in whaling and mission stations. When the first Christian missionaries arrived in 1814, they commenced translating the Bible into Māori and setting up mission schools for the "natives". Māori language grammars and translations of the New Testament appeared in 1827 (Belich 1996). At the time of signing of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), the population of New Zealand was estimated between 70,000 and 90,000, and the European population was 2,000 (Pool 1991). *Te reo M*āori was thus the dominant language in New Zealand until this time. The Treaty, however, opened up the country's gates to mass settlement. A rapid influx of land-hungry European settlers followed. This resulted in a series of land wars lasting from 1845 to 1872. More lands were taken through

the Land Court set up to deal with transfer of lands from Māoris to the Crown. The Māori population dropped from 60,000 in 1858 to 42,000 in 1896. At the same time the European population increased from 59,000 in 1858 to 7,70,000 in 1901 and the Māori people became a minority in their own land (O'Regan, 2006: 157). Following these wars, large amounts of land were confiscated from tribes considered to be in rebellion against the Crown. After the Treaty, English was encouraged in mission schools. In 1858 government grants to mission schools included the requirement of teaching both English manners and English language (Benton 1981: 44).

The 1867 Native Schools Act which has been described as "... the major step in the shift from Māori monolingualism" (Spolsky 2003: 68) insisted on the use of English in the native schools that were set up in Māori communities. O'Regan (2006: 158) summarizes the corollary of this act on the Māori language thus:

> For the best part of 80 years *te reo Māori* was to be suppressed in schools and generations of Māori pupils severely beaten if caught speaking Māori in school grounds. The aim was assimilation of Māori with the wider community and was fed by a belief that a person's fluency in Māori would be at the cost of his proficiency and therefore ultimately the success of Māori children in the Pākehā world.

While English made considerable inroads, *te reo Māori* still remained the dominant language in 90 per cent of homes well into the 1900s. A more noticeable shift is thought to have begun in the 1930s. This was due to the increased number of non-Māoris living in Māori communities, the effects of the Great Depression, and increased movement away from tribal areas in search of work. The shift to English was rapid in towns and rural areas of low Māori population. Urbanisation contributed to the breakdown in transmission of Māori. Many Māoris are physically separated from *iwis* (tribes). A generation for which Māwas, the dominant language, was now followed by a bilingual generation, which was then followed by a generation dominant in English. The shift to English in intergenerational transmission was almost complete. In the 1970s the language reached its nadir. A report issued in the 1960s, for example, described the language as a relic of ancient life (O'Regan 2006: 158). Sociolinguistic surveys conducted by Benton in the early 1970s (Benton 1991) provided crucial evidence of the almost complete disruption of intergenerational Māori language transmission. Fluency was limited mainly to adults in the 45 plus age group.

Colonization, especially during nineteenth century, in Aotearoa/New Zealand and in Ireland, was a prime factor in significant language shift to English from Māori and Irish, somewhat similar to language endangerment in postcolonial cultures elsewhere. During the twentieth century, the need for language revitalization became increasingly apparent.

Language revitalization in Ireland and Aotearoa

Language revitalization involves the ongoing counter-balancing of forces, which have caused or continue to cause language shift. Language revitalization involves a reversal of language shift where people begin to use a language that has been moribund or threatened by extinction, so that its vitality is gradually restored (Spolsky 1996: 6). The process is complex and may take a while to achieve its goals. It involves any or all of the following (Ó Laoire 2006):

- Adding new sets of speakers to the language crucially involving the home domain and intergenerational transmission (Spolsky 1996; King 2001);
- Adding new functions by introducing the language into new domains, where it was previously unused or relatively underused;
- The revalorization of the language to be revived by the speakers and neo-speakers (Huss et al. 2003);
- Involvement and activity by the speech community with a strong awareness that positive attitudes, action, commitment, strong acts of will and sacrifice may be necessary to save and revitalize the language.

Language planning for language revitalization has been ongoing in Ireland much longer than in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In Ireland efforts towards revitalizing Irish began with the end of colonization and independence in 1922, while the movement towards Māori language revitalization only began as recently as the end of the 1970s. Nonetheless, there are historical and contemporary parallels between both the countries in their language revitalization efforts and similar efforts have been pursued in language planning.

With the native government in place in 1922, it was expected that Irish would gradually replace English as the language of the state. Thus language planning efforts could be described as a reversal of language shift towards Irish. The education system became the bedrock on which language planning was based. The espoused planning policies for revitalization devolved almost entirely on the schools. Announcing its policies on Irish in the schools in 1922, the government's aim, simply stated, was to gradually replace English with Irish as the sole medium of instruction in all subjects (Ó Domhnalláin 1977; Ó Buachalla 1984; 1988).

Perhaps the most salient feature of the language planning was the "immersion" approach, adopted by the Māoris in the 1970s. In the early years of the Irish language revitalization efforts, planning was top-down and imposed by the state. A new programme early in the 1930s laid down Irish as the sole medium of instruction and activities during the first three years of schooling. This meant that, across Ireland, English-speaking children, on commencing attendance at primary schools, were immersed in an Irish language environment for all classroom interactions among infants and early classes (grades). Teachers were

urged to teach through the medium of Irish in higher classes and it was hoped that schools would gradually be teaching all subjects, except English language, in Irish. All-Irish primary schools thrived between 1930 and 1940. In 1930 there were 228 of them, accounting for 4 per cent of the national primary schools. This figure trebled, and by 1940, there were 632 such schools. The language, therefore, was taught intensively and used as the sole medium of instruction and of in-school activities wherever feasible during the first years of schooling of Irish in higher classes.

The State, in its revival movement up to the early 1960s, had little by way of definitive success. It was forced to rethink its entire revivalist strategy in the 1960s when there was an open admission that English could never be shifted or supplanted.[2] In fact the extent of erosion and contraction of the language during colonisation and in the early years of the State constrained any possibility of top-down intervention. The immersion schools had lost popular and teacher support and had dwindled from 623 (12 per cent of all primary schools) in 1940 to 251 or 5 per cent by 1970 (Comhairle na Gaeilge 1974: 17).

Thus, early Irish language revitalisation efforts, between 1922 and 1960, had limited success in adding new sets of speakers to the language involving the home domain and intergenerational transmission.

Fishman (1993: 3) has noted that the last third of the twentieth century witnessed a global ethnic revival with a renewed interest in indigenous and minority cultures and languages. The Irish and Māori situations bear interesting witness to this phenomenon. In the 1970s the Irish language revitalisation efforts changed. Bottom-up language planning emerged in both situations. Significantly, this followed a similar movement and response in both communities that contextualised language issues within the broader question of civil and human rights.

The 1960s witnessed several Māori groups—some of them student-based—campaigning actively for an increase in the use of Māori in the broadcast media. The 1970s has been characterized as an age of protest as Māoris rallied nationally to fight for their rights and to raise awareness of the status and plight of Māori language and culture (O'Regan 2006: 158). Three tribes, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toa and Te Āti Awa developed a strategy to reverse language decline in their areas and to begin to produce and foster new generations of *te reo Māori* speakers. As in the early Irish revivalist strategy, education was identified as the key agency and focus of revival efforts. In 1978, the first bilingual school—Tuatoki School—was founded. In 1982 the first *kōhanga reo*

[2] An official State publication on the restoration of the Irish language stated clearly: "English will remain the language chiefly used outside the *Gaeltacht* for various purposes. To assume otherwise would be unrealistic and detract from appreciation of the effort needed to achieve the national aim in regard to Irish" (Government of Ireland 1965: 10).

(language nest) was formed, which allowed for the provision of Māori language early childhood immersion education. The *kōhanga reo* movement grew rapidly and by 1985 the first *kura kaupapa Māori* or Māori-medium primary school had been established. The development and growth of immersion education was seen as a key focus in the drive to revitalise *te reo* (Te Puni Kōkiri 2001). The Māoris have made remarkable strides over the past twenty-five years.[3] A range of structures to support the language have been developed in education, broadcasting and in other aspects of life (ibid. 2004). While the key strategy for the past twenty-five years has been on building a critical mass of speakers through education (ibid. 2003: 7), the revitalisation strategy will now focus on greater use of the language in the community within the next twenty-five years. Māori gained official status with the passing of the Māori Language Act in 1987. Government departments and agencies now have bilingual names and bilingual signage and stationery are commonplace.

Similarly in Ireland, Irish language revitalization strategies are located more in bottom-up community efforts. Here, too, movement towards guaranteeing civil and linguistic rights resulted in a number of important initiatives. In 1969, a special movement to seek and ensure civil rights for the *Gaeltacht* residents was founded. Public demonstrations were held and an illegal Irish language radio station was established in 1970. The State responded to the pressure by establishing a national Irish language radio station and eventually an Irish language television channel. Grassroots community groups operating from a civil rights ideological base continue to play a similar role in drawing up a decentralized language planning agenda. At approximately the same time as the low point in the number of all-Irish schools in the early 1970s a number of "new" Irish immersion schools were being established in response to parental demand for Irish-medium education. This is an example of local decentralized functional language planning. Currently, all-Irish immersion education is relatively successful and is becoming increasingly popular in Ireland (Ó Laoire 2008a).

The Official Languages Act of 2003[4] gave people the right to use the language in transactions with state bodies, and is the first piece of legislation to provide a statutory framework for the delivery of services through the Irish Language. The year 2004 was dominated by a public campaign to press for official European Union (EU) recognition of Irish. In April, more than 5,000 supporters took to the streets of Dublin, calling on the government to seek official working status for Irish in the EU. An on-line petition with up to 80,000 signatures was

[3] For an evaluation, see Benton and Benton (2001).

[4] To quote the Irish Language Office in Dublin, "The aim of the Official Languages Act 2003 is to increase and improve in an organised manner, over a period of time, the quantity and quality of services provided for the public through Irish by public bodies. The legislation intends to create a space for the language in public affairs in Ireland."

presented. In November, the Irish Government tabled a proposal in the EU Parliament in Brussels seeking official and working status in the EU for the Irish language. It has now had this status since January 2007 (Ó Laoire 2008b). In 2006, the government announced a 20-year strategy to help Ireland become a fully bilingual country (Irish Government 2006), involving a 13-point plan to encourage the use of the language in all aspects of life.

A research survey shows that there have been considerable revitalization successes in both these countries, especially in the last twenty years. During this period, both the language communities have gone about the business of planning in more or less similar ways. There has been a shift from top-down policy imposition to bottom-up, grassroots initiatives. The early language planning efforts in Ireland, involving a top-down approach, concentrating mainly on education, were relatively fruitless. A different bottom-up approach, which has characterized revitalization strategies and planning in both situations since the 1970s, has been more sanguine. New sets of speakers are being added to the languages through education. Language has been introduced into new domains like radio broadcasting, the Internet and television, and there is an increasing evidence of a collective revalorisation of traditional speakers and neo-speakers. Nevertheless, the road to language revitalization is far from secure for both the languages, as it continues to wind its way through dangerous territory with well-signposted paths towards an English language globalizing world.

Language Endangerment and Globalization

In the twenty-first century globalization has become one of the most powerful challenges for the secure future of minority languages worldwide. Globalization not only represents significant change in economics, technology and politics for nations and continents, it also represents fast-changing sets of beliefs, values and attitudes. In world economy and world market terms, it is characterized by a shrinkage and contraction of space and time wherein trade, marketing, communication and information flow are efficiently and speedily facilitated. The growing interdependence of countries world-wide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services, and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology, is not just an economic phenomenon. It is also social, cultural and psychological. In sociolinguistic terms it has come to be associated with the global spread and acceptance of English as a lingua franca, and of the endangerment of minority or less-used languages.

Much has been written over the past two decades on language endangerment. Emphasis was placed firmly on the protection of cultural diversity ahead of the sweeping, homogenizing tidal wave of globalization (Hale 1991). Linguists have been saddened by the vast amount of cultural and linguistic knowledge that

is disappearing with increasing globalization. Dividing the world's languages into three categories—moribund, endangered and safe—Krauss draws parallels between language endangerment and the endangerment of biological species in the natural world. He refers to languages that are not spoken as mother tongues as being beyond mere endangerment, "... doomed to extinction like species lacking reproductive capacity" (Krauss 1992: 4). In discussing the circumstances that have led to language mortality, he singles out one of the corollaries of and effective agencies of globalization, i.e. the electronic media, referring to television as "an incalculably lethal new weapon (which I call cultural nerve gas)" (ibid.: 6). Since the publication of his article, scholarly attention has grown into an almost frantic concern, with a special urgency to mobilize concerted remedial action underpinning the research. The call for an engaged, politically active linguist, rather than the disengaged academic involved only in description and documentation became the hallmark of the new approach and engendered a lively debate during the 1990s.[5] The debate continued on this matter (e.g. Edwards 1994) and the issue of language death (Crystal 2000) and language genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000) continue, and will continue, to be central to future language discussion (Nettle and Romaine 2008; Grenoble and Whaley 1998). Wurm (2001) has suggested that languages being learned by less than 30 per cent of the younger generation of their native speakers are at risk. With concerns arising from a general consensus that at least half of the world's 6,000–7,000 languages will disappear in the next century (Crystal 2000), research work in the area by linguists takes them into what Edwards terms as "... heavily mined territories of emotion" (2003: 45).

As the debate on language endangerment continues, English—the language of contact and the agency of shift with which Irish and Māori must compete—has emerged as the strongest global language (Crystal 1997), although Spanish and Chinese are also considered as the other "spreading languages" (Nettle and Romaine 2000: 48). English is the third most widely spoken after Mandarin and Spanish; but combining native and non-native speakers, it is probably the most widely spoken language in the world, though what makes a language a global language has little to do with numbers of speakers (Crystal 1997: 7). While, on the one hand, a causal link between the phenomenon of the global adoption of English and the demise of many minoritized languages has been well established by research, on the other hand, its emergence as a global language has stimulated and mobilized a greater response in support of local languages. The advent of vigorous movements in support of linguistic minorities testifies to a strong need to establish the authenticity of indigenous or differing identities. This indeed is being done by threatened speech communities, fleeing like refugees from the hegemony of global standardization. Some researchers and members of speech communities engaged in language planning for language

[5] See, for example, Ladefoged (1992), Dorian (1993) Brenzinger (1992;1998).

revitalization are now working towards contributing to the rise of a linguistic ethic or a set of attitudes in favour of the protection of linguistic diversity (Martí et al. 2005). Crystal, for example, states, "Language is a major means (some would say the chief means) of showing where we belong and of distinguishing one social group from another, and all over the world we can see evidence of linguistic divergence rather than convergence" (1997: 22). What, then, should be the trajectory of revitalization efforts for languages like Irish and Māori in the context of globalization? Some of the issues that impact future policy and planning directions will be explored in the remainder of this chapter.

Possible Responses to Globalization

Two opposing reactions to globalization have emerged in recent years among scholars and activists in language revitalization. One of these is to contest globalization as a predator on smaller cultures, languages and traditional ways of behaviour. This view has been represented, for example, in the work of Nettle and Romaine (2000), Grenoble and Whaley (1998; 2006). Another view adopts a more benign attitude to globalization, treating it as a necessary step in the evolution of humankind and bearing the potential for growth, preservation of identities, fostering interdependence and forging new cultural hybrids. This work finds representation in the views of Crystal (1997). He recognizes the legacy of colonialism, cultural imperialism and power asymmetries between the former colonial and the developing nations. Spolsky, however, favours an alternative reading of language revitalization to the conventional postcolonial interpretation, moving towards acceptable negotiation, of languages in contact, i.e. two languages or more sharing a common space, "each taking an active role in negotiating the way in which that sharing should be instantiated as regards language choice" (2005). This view, which posits traditional uniqueness in dialogue with global realities, appears to offer more potential for the future. Rather than decrying the overwhelming realities of the postcolonial legacy and current mobilizing hegemonic realities, it might be more energising for minority language communities to engage and dialogue meaningfully with the forces of ongoing change. Cronin reminds us, for example, "The casual despair or easy cynicism that all is lost in the face of the overwhelming fact of standardization of experience and expression is contradicted by the evidence of a world that is certainly becoming similar in certain respects but is constantly fragmenting in many others" (2005: 53).

The counter-move to globalizing uniformity, therefore, should avoid cultural fragmentation, but should move towards "relatedness", and be about sharing space and about being networked to a world of different histories. This move embraces the tools of globalization, i.e. media, information and communication technologies. The minority languages must gain access to

domains related to socio-economic advancement. Media and information technologies may play a crucial role in respect of such advancement. These include channels of mass and long-distance communication like newspapers, radio, television, telephone, text messaging, email, websites, blogging, etc. that enable us to receive, produce, reproduce and manipulate messages of our own. The upsurge of interactivity made possible by the global "democratisation" of media, including broadcasting and live television and Internet media has witnessed a proliferation of new types of reciprocal communications. This has two important implications for language revitalization efforts, both in the present and in the future. Firstly, it means that the minority speech community must fully embrace media technologies as a means of dialoguing with a globalized world. Secondly, it means that the potential of media and media technologies must be fully exploited in teaching the minority language. Minority language television, in the case of Irish and Māori, has already made considerable impact not only on the minority language community, but also on the wider English language community, as Kelly-Holmes has pointed out (2001). Walden, for example interestingly stated in an inaugural address for the new Māori language television station in 2004:

> The impact of television on our every day society is undeniable. A key role of Māori Television is to normalise the use of *te reo Māori*, to make it relevant to people from all walks of life, and show it in use in everyday settings that are relevant to them. From now on, every person in this country will have more access to programmes and information about Māori than they have ever had before—our history and culture, our old people, our young people and our dreams for the future. [...]. This is another key role for Māori Television: to become the leader in increasing knowledge and understanding of the Māori world for all New Zealanders. From now on, every person in this country will have more access to programmes and information about Māori than they have ever had before—our history and culture, our old people, our young people and our dreams for the future. (Māori Television Newsletter No. 5, 29 March 2004, http://www.maoritelevision.com/newsletter/issue5/index.htm).

Television is a medium which points clearly to the potential of minority languages for survival in an increasingly globalized market. As well as serving the needs of the speech community, the media must reach a wider audience if the language is to survive and compete with global languages. In doing this, of course, care must be taken not to short-change native, near-native or neo-speakers. Television and media can change attitudes in that they bring another language into the home, thus changing its linguistic constitution (Ó Laoire 2001). Yet, if the essential work of language revitalization is not attended to, there may be little point ultimately of dialoguing with a wider world. Media technologies bring new opportunities and challenges for the minority language community in its efforts to secure language revitalization in a globalized world.

Final Considerations

Language loss or language shift involves a situation where communities witness the gradual displacement of one language by another in their lives. The factors that contribute to language loss or language endangerment are varied and complex. Indigenous and minority languages appear to be more endangered than ever in the twenty-first century. While language death is not new, there is a certain urgency about invigorating threatened languages to ensure their survival and global linguistic diversity. In the growing context of globalization, the causal link between the phenomenon of the global adoption of English and the demise of many minoritized languages has been well established by research. Yet, the emergence as a global language has stimulated and mobilized a greater response in support of local minority languages. Rather than suppressing indigenous and linguistic difference, minority and indigenous groups have resisted and re-asserted identity and have been emboldened to pursue cultural and language rights.

One of the hallmarks of language revitalization is the revalorisation of the language to be revived by the speakers and neo-speakers. To enable this revalorization, the minority or indigenous speech community, like Irish and Māori, can adopt a new outlook on its position in a globalized world. Rather than acting out a conventional postcolonial paradigm, deriving ultimately fatigable energies from fighting the asymmetries of given postcolonial and post-imperial realities, indigenous and minority speech communities engaged in language revitalization might move towards a situation of acceptable negotiation with the language(s) of contact. This view posits a creative dialogue with global realities and appears to offer more potential for future development and evolution.

The uniqueness of the Irish and Maori worldviews in a globalized world must also be emphasized. The languages are surviving without their respective heartlands that once served as their sole base for transmission (more children in Ireland, for example, are learning Irish outside the *Gaeltacht* than in the traditional heartland of the *Gaeltacht* itself). Both languages survive and have carved out their critical niches, in the globalized media and information technologies. They are still primary vehicles of identity and are laden with symbolic and cultural as well as communicative value. They are also vehicles that bring the global world to communities of speakers and communities of speakers to the world. These realities provide for a significant alternative reading of language revitalization to the conventional postcolonial interpretation, moving more towards acceptable negotiations of languages in contact of languages sharing common space, taking an active role in negotiating the way in which that sharing should be the hallmark of all future language revitalization trajectories.

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4

Rewriting Columbus
Coatlicue's Dramatization of Mexican Indigenous History

Christiane Schlote
University of Berne, Switzerland

In the "Artistic Statement" preceding their play *1992: Blood Speaks* (1992), the indigenous performance artists Elvira and Hortensia Colorado, the Chichimec/Otomi founders of Coatlicue Theatre Company, currently located in New York City, state: "We became writers out of necessity to speak in our own voices instead of being spoken for" (Colorado 1992: 79). The claim for the right of self-representation has long been one of the major tenets of postcolonial criticism and it has been closely linked with the politics of rewriting colonial history. Yet, while many indigenous artists share a belief in the need for historical reconstruction, they also remain sceptical of the larger postcolonial paradigm, since, as Devon Abbott Mihesuah observes in regard to tribal America, "tribes are still attempting to deal with the very real effects of colonialism" (2003: xiii). Referring to Australian Aboriginal writers, Elleke Boehmer claims that their "distinctiveness lies in their hybrid status; *not* in the way in which cultural authenticity is achieved (if indeed it ever is), but rather in how the non-indigenous is adapted, translated, transliterated, in order that selfhood and solidarity may be expressed" (Boehmer 2005: 225; emphasis in original).

This chapter sets out to explore indigenous performance practices in a transnational age by analyzing the strategies the Colorado sisters employ in their work to cross the gap between biographical, socio-political and cultural experiences, forms and narratives of intercultural encounters, as witnessed in their productions such as *Walks of Indian Women: Aztlán to Anahuac* (1989), *Tlatilco: The Place Where Things are Hidden* (1989), *Coyolxauhquli: Women Without Borders* (1990), *Huipil* (1993), *A Traditional Kind of Woman: Too Much, Not 'Nuff!* (1994), *Open Wounds on Tlalteucili* (1994) and *La Llorona: The Wailing Woman*. In this chapter, I will address some terminological and methodological

minefields in regard to indigenous theatre in general, before turning to *1992: Blood Speaks*, with a particular focus on issues of gendered historiography and the Colorado sisters' use of metaphors of "survival" and "weaving" and "Coatlicue" as a symbol of syncretic fusion. The group's Nahuatl name, Coatlicue—literally "the one with the skirt of serpents"—is taken from the Aztec goddess of the earth.

Critics have long noted that despite being one of the oldest, and at the same time owing to their syncretic nature, one of the most innovative dramatic traditions, indigenous performances in the Americas have been marked by a curious "lack of visibility and critical recognition" on the one hand and, when it is discussed, by an "anthropological orientation" (Däwes 2007: 3), on the other. Analyzing indigenous theatre mainly within the fields of anthropology or religious studies, not only relegates it to the position of an exotic and "remote cultural Other", but also denies it its representational agency, as Birgit Däwes puts it (ibid.: 3). Kateri Damm also points out that too "often, the image of the Indigenous writer which comes to mind will be one of a 'storyteller', 'traditional' in appearance and dress, dark-skinned, raven-haired, who uses 'legends' or 'myths' to teach the audience about his or her culture" (1993: 13). In a similar vein, Teresa Gómez Reus (2002: 105) emphasizes that the "persistent institutional reduction of native American (or black/Chicano) art to an ethnographic spectacle inevitably denies artists their status as historical subjects and segregates them, in a typically racist manoeuvre, outside the aesthetic and intellectual discourses of contemporary experience".

In regard to the term "indigenous", I draw on Susan Kellogg's concept. She positions it, "at the intersection of self- and scholarly definition", where it refers to "individuals and groups who identify themselves as autochthonous, or original, peoples" as well as to "their close connections to lands and territories that they once controlled (and sometimes still do)". Very importantly, Kellogg further differentiates between the numerous uses of the term within different national, regional, local and class contexts, so that "indigenous" can signify a diverse number of people "whose biological and cultural identities may be quite mixed" (Kellogg 2005: 7–8). Mihesuah (2003: xxi–xxii) further points towards the need to refer to the indigenous people of the Americas by specific tribal names.

There have been different responses to the scarcity of primary material as well as to methodological dilemmas inherent in the study of indigenous communities. As Mihesuah in her study, *Indigenous American Women. Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*, advises: "If writers want to find out what native women think, they should ask them" (Mihesuah 2003: 4). In this chapter, I will largely draw on an interview I did at the Indian Community House

with Elvira and Hortensia Colorado in New York in July 1993.[1] Nonetheless, I believe that any critical engagement with indigenous theatres, in particular, remains embroiled in the problematic issues of commodification, critical authority and the politics of representation; and it is further complicated by misconceptions of authenticity and persistent questions concerning the effects of Western critical reception.

In this respect, Margaret Atwood's warning in regard to an uncritical notion of authenticity and source material is exemplary: "Interviews are an art form in themselves. As such, they're fictional and arranged. The illusion that what you're getting is the straight truth from the writer and accurate in every detail, is false." Statements such as the following by the Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith from *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) continue to question the function and effect of discussing indigenous issues in Western academic settings: "... taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions" (quoted in Mihesuah 2003: 3). In my following reading of *1992: Blood Speaks* I would like to complement Atwood's and Smith's important reservations with a credo of the scholar and filmmaker Trinh Minh-Ha (1991: 76), which partially hints at a way out of the aforementioned methodological impasse: "Awareness of the limits in which one work need not lead to any form of indulgence in personal partiality, nor to the narrow conclusion that it is impossible to understand anything about other peoples since the difference is one of 'essence'".

The play *1992: Blood Speaks* was first produced at the American Indian Community House in New York City for the 500th anniversary of Columbus' voyage to America and as part of the Indian Summer 1992 Festival. It was directed by Muriel Miguel, a founding member and the artistic director of Spiderwoman Theater. Both Elvira and Hortensia Colorado were part of the original cast. According to their "Artistic Statement", the play was inspired by a recurring dream of the colour red: "Red: the *sangre*/blood that was shed, the blood/life running through our veins, fire, genocide. There was an urgency, a rage, a need to speak of the pivotal role that religion/Christianity played in the oppression and genocide of native people" (Colorado 1992: 80).

In his innovative study, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media and Identity* (1998), Steven Leuthold examines the impact and the role of new media on indigenous aesthetic expressions and how these, in turn, "shape collective identification", particularly in times of social change and conflict (1998: 14). *1992: Blood Speaks*, a multi-media production incorporating music, songs, murals and videotaped scenes of village community life as well as interviews of Zapotec women that the Colorado sisters conducted in Oaxaca, is a fitting

[1] I am grateful to Elvira and Hortensia Colorado for granting me this interview at the Indian Community House in New York in July 1993.

example of indigenous aesthetics which, due to colonial encounters, is *per se* intercultural:

> By indigenous aesthetics, I am referring to thoughts about aesthetic experience that developed independently of the Western tradition in various parts of the world [...]. However, since most indigenous peoples have had a history of contact with explorers [...] and conquerors, the study of present-day indigenous aesthetics is primarily intercultural in nature. (Leuthold 1998: 2)

In its revision of the Columbus myth, *1992: Blood Speaks* draws on pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial sources and dramatic strategies. The play is divided into twelve short scenes in the tradition of the *acto*, the specific Mexican American dramatic form (not unlike Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstücke*) introduced by the pioneering Chicago playwright Luis Valdez and his grassroots company *El Teatro Campesino*. The flexible form of the *acto* lends itself to the use of satirical humour as well as to the conveyance of socio-political messages:

> In standard Spanish, *acto* means 'an act, action' and can also be used in the theatrical sense for an 'act' of a play. For Valdez' [...] and all of the groups that later employed the form, the acto was and is a political statement [...]. What distinguishes the *acto* from plays scripted by an individual playwright is its genesis: the *acto* is collectively created through improvisation based on the experiences of its participants. (Huerta 1982: 15–16; emphasis in original)

Coatlicue further draws on the techniques of the oldest native American women's theatre company, Spiderwoman Theater, also an ensemble founded by three sisters—Lisa Mayo, Gloria Miguel and Muriel Miguel—in 1975 and, shortly after, discovered and supported by Valdez (Däwes 2007: 215). As Elvira Colorado explains:

> The way we work is basically the way Spiderwoman work. We take a theme and we sit down, we explore, we talk among ourselves, talk and talk for hours, for days, weeks [...] we put it on tape, and we transcribe it and we edit it out. [...] And we take out what the essence of that story is and maybe somebody else tells another story, maybe the other person will tell your story and you mix the two stories together. It's all sort of woven together. So it comes out of a lot of talking. And those stories come from memories, newspaper articles, things we heard on the radio. Things that have to be addressed, social issues, a lot of it has to do with women's issues and their struggle. (Author's interview)

The employment of a storyteller "to position within and alongside imperial and settler narratives the stories [...] that constitute indigenous history" (Gilbert/Tompkins 1996: 130) has, of course, long been one of the most effective counter-discursive means of postcolonial writers and playwrights.

As in Coatlicue's case, Spiderwoman's choice of name is not accidental but signifies their most important dramatic technique. Spider Woman is the female creative principle and earth goddess in the Hopi creation myth, who

taught people to weave and who "created the world as a web of stories" (Däwes 2007: 219). Thus Spiderwoman Theater developed a technique which they call "storyweaving", in which they "create designs and weave stories with words and movement, creating an overlay of interlocking stories, where fantasy and power are comically intertwined" (Perkins/Uno 1996: 297). This kind of collage of episodic stories is embedded in and supported by the non-hierarchical content of the play, already exemplified in their early play *Sun Moon and Feather* (1981). In this play, Spiderwoman Theater explore the family history of three sisters, including the use of old home movies made by their uncle Joseph Henry and the group's "signature backdrop" (Däwes 2007: 216), "made of cloth pieces called *molas*" (Perkins/Uno 1996: 299) and material from their tribe, the Rappahannock. While the use of such exclusive props may be seen as a strategy in order to avoid any easy appropriation of the play, at the same time, the thematic focus of the play actually promotes a perspective beyond tribal and national boundaries (Däwes 2007: 216).

1992: Blood Speaks is based on a similar framework and, likewise, draws on interviews and personal family stories or, as Downing Cless (1996: 93) also points out in reference to Coatlicue's play *Open Wounds on Tlalteucli*, as "in all their work, 'Stories are our medicine,' so a series of brief vignettes drawn form the sisters' research (often interviews) forms the basis of the structure". Throughout the twelve scenes of the play the Colorado sisters trace the powerful force and effects of colonialism, and the audience is confronted with different cultural and historical perspectives. Stylistically, the devastation brought on by the Spanish conquistadores is visualised through the gradual layering of the original painted mural, depicting village life before the invasion, by three screens representing Christianity, flames and blood (Colorado 1993: 80).

In terms of theatrical movements, the play charts a course from the "Creation Story" to a subversive rendition of "America the Beautiful", starting with the first scene, entitled "Creation Story", where all four actresses enter, put *rebozos* (Mexican shawls often used for carrying children) on the floor and lie down, except Hortensia Colorado who wears three traditional Mayan blouses (*huipil*) and who, in the act of creation, peels off one after the other: "This is the beginning. [...] Sucked deep into the beginning. Cool. Soft. Red dust now red clay" (ibid.: 82). The creation scene fades into the very short, seemingly idyllic pre-Spanish second scene with the title "Village Awakening/Chores", where the four actresses braid hair, gather wood and make tortillas. But the third scene, "Huipil Story 1", immediately disrupts the pastoral peace and quiet of the previous scene on various levels.

From now on the play is marked by various degrees of multilingualism, starting with a song sung in Zapotec and overlapping with a Gregorian Chant in Spanish at the moment of the arrival of "many, many men [...] sitting on tall animals" with "long shiny sticks and hats" and "eyes like the color of the

sky" (ibid.: 83). The linguistic and musical overlap reflects the multilayered plot, which cannot be captured in linear, chronological form, but which goes beyond conventional realist theatre traditions. In *Postcolonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins see the use of non-European languages as a strategy to contest hegemony:

> These local languages can provide a particularised medium in/through which to stage a culture's stories and speak its concerns. [...] A particularly effective form of subversion occurs when one character moves between registers, showing that s/he is quite capable of using all manner of linguistic codes but chooses certain ones strategically. (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 177)

The following exchange from the fourth scene of *1992: Blood Speaks*, entitled "Proclamation", is exemplary of this kind of code switching:

> SONI: I, servant of the high and mighty conquerors, being their messenger and captain, notify and inform you ...
>
> HORTENSIA: That God our Lord, One and eternal. Porque la multitud procediente de esta pareva desde las creación del mundo ...
>
> SONI: God!
>
> ELVIRA: Superior ... obedecer ...
>
> PURA FE: ... under whatever law ...
>
> SONI: Giving to him the entire world ...
>
> HORTENSIA: That God our Lord ... One and eternal ...
>
> ELVIRA: La iglesia es superior y todos deben obedecerla.
>
> SONI: ... preach this to you ... Kneel. Rise. Kneel. Rise. Kneel. Rise. Kneel. Rise. Kneel. Rise. (Ibid.: 83)

Kateri Damm (1993: 19) states that "the mixed-bloods, if they can avoid becoming what Lee Maracle calls 'crippled two-tongues', become 'bilingual' interpreters, able to speak in the idiom of both 'White' and 'Indigenous' groups". As in the work of Spiderwoman Theater, the image of a spider's web can serve to illustrate the linkage between the different perspectives provided and the variety of stories dramatized. According to Christy Stanlake, stories "are gestures, vocal sounds, breath, movement, dance, and chant. The portions of the stories are not connected one to the other at 'logical' seams; rather, they overlap, circle, juxtapose, synchronize, and intertwine" (quoted in Däwes 2007: 219). This is also used to great effect on a plot level when, right before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers, the telling of the mythical story of a sacred tree is overlapping with a video sequence of the contemporary story of the Mexican American social worker and women's rights activist Juana Vasquez telling a Huipil story in Zapotec.

The often violent fusion of past and present of Zapotec folk song and Spanish chant, of Aztec creation story and Christianity, of colonizers and colonized is

the focus of the following scenes. Yet, despite the brutality of the encounter described in the scene with the title 'Atrocities' ("They entered towns [...] and ripped open the bellies of children ... Elders ... and pregnant women, tearing them to pieces. [...] The Spaniards created a human butcher shop" (Colorado 1993: 84). The scene is framed in comments in Zapotec, thus fostering indigenous historiography and denying those audience members, who are unable to understand Zapotec, full access. Here, Elvira and Hortensia Colorado employ what the Moroccan poet Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine has called "guerrilla linguistics" (Hawley 1996: xxi) and what Doris Sommer has identified as intentional textual gaps in her insightful and comprehensive study *Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (1999).

Other strategies of stressing indigenous resistance and agency are Elvira and Hortensia Colorado's use of space which, in contrast to the mainly proscenium-arched stages of traditional "imperial theatre" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 157), invites the audience to participate within a communal, ritualized framework, and their use of humour and absurdity, as seen in the staging of the comic "Columbus's Birthday Party" (Scene 8). Agency is here understood as "a certain knowledgeability, whereby experiences and desires are reflexively interpreted and internalised (consciously or otherwise), and the capability to command relevant skills, access to material and non-material resources and engage in particular organising practices" (Long quoted in Essed et al. 2004: 2) and it also includes critical investigations of the part colonized peoples played in times of conquest and occupation (Boehmer 2005: 188):

> ELVIRA and HORTENSIA: There is going to be a big birthday party. It's going to be a surprise ...
>
> HORTENSIA: Now, we going to have a rehearsal, a dry run. I'm going to count to three, and you all shout 'Surprise!' Okay? Now, ready. One, two, three, 'Surprise!' Good, you a good group—and smart too. Now this time we going to count in Spanish. You all know Spanish, right? This time when we count, uno, dos, tres—you clap.
>
> [...]
>
> ELVIRA: Now for zee guest list. A who's who of zee entertainment world. Aren't you zee lucky ones to be here. At zee top of zee guest list: La Queen Chavelita with King Ferdinand, of course. [...] the Grand High Wizard of the KKK, Madonna as Frida Kahlo, Michael Jackson, Speedy Gonzalez, John Wayne, the Pope [...], la migra y el border patrol. Okay, okay and Burt Reynolds. (Colorado 1992: 85)

Apart from being a deconstructive move in response to stereotypical as well as commodified iconic representations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans across different media, this syncretic incorporation of (Mexican) American popular culture is not least part of the Colorados' own explorations of the contradictions of their hyphenated upbringing and identities. Born in Chicago of native and Mexican parents who denied their roots, their conceptualisation

of mestiza identities is also mirrored in their choice of the group's name, Coatlicue, which symbolises the multiple layers within their lives and their work and which has been described as "a mestizo consciousness" promoting "not the replacement of one culture by another but, rather, the interaction between different strands, however conflictual their coexistence may be" (Reus 2002: 112):

> There also was a lot of denial in our family. Denial of the indigenous. My mother always used to say how everybody was Spanish, you know, because it was more acceptable to be Spanish as opposed to being Indians. [...] we grew up with all that denial. When we were children we used to travel back and forth to Mexico and go visit all my mother's relatives. But we never visited the relatives on my father's side. We never knew them. The pictures of them were all buried in a trunk in the basement, because they were too Indian looking. Their pictures were never hung on the wall or anything like that. So we never really knew them. (Author's interview in 1993)

Gloria Anzaldúa describes the "goddess of birth and death" as "the incarnation of cosmic processes":

> *Coatlicue* depicts the contradictory. In her figure, all the symbols important to the religion and philosophy of the Aztecs are integrated. [...] she is a symbol of the fusion of opposites: the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror. (1987: 47; emphasis in original)

Inevitably, these binaries are also reflected in that most potent symbol of Mexican American relations, the Mexican-American border, which Anzaldúa identifies as a "dividing line" and a "borderland [...] a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary [...] in a constant state of transition" (Anzaldúa 1989: 194).

Despite the depiction of the horrors of the conquest, *1992: Blood Speaks* is not only a satirical deconstruction of colonial historiography, but it can also be read as a gendered and indigenous rewriting of history and an affirmation of the Colorado sisters' status as urban *mestizas* in contemporary New York, as Elvira Colorado puts it:

> I never thought I would be a writer until I was forced to become a writer because of the lack of words that was out there for us. We had to create our own words, and write our own materials so that we could perform them. So writing for me is a means of surviving. (Author's interview)

1992: Blood Speaks is framed by mythical scenes and thus grounded as much in ancestral and tribal heritages (Däwes 2007: 220), as in the transnational reality of the contemporary Americas. As such it also explores different ways of storytelling and mediating cultural memory, which departs from realist drama.

Significantly, the play ends with a song and dance for future generations, mixing Nahuatl and English, celebrating the spirit of survival in eco-feminist terms and thereby providing an alternative reading of the initially violent image of the play's title:

> ELVIRA: Do not forget to tell your children, that they may tell the children of their children of their children, with proper respect. Tell them how it was … how it will be … how we will rise again … how to gain strength and how our culture will fulfil its great destiny on our beloved Mother Earth. (Colorado 1992: 89)

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5

Contemporary Yoruba Funeral*
A Discursive Personal Narrative

F. Odun Balogun
Delaware State University, USA

Introduction: A Familiar Thesis

The recent experience of my mother's passing away, and the subsequent funeral services became for me a revealing moment of cultural convergence and synthesis that surprisingly affirmed the truth of the old adage, "the more things change, the more they remain the same". Simultaneously, as I went through the currently sanctioned practices of the burial tradition, memories of the old procedures in that tradition, evoked by resemblances to or convergences with the current observances insistently drew my attention to what, in the sphere of dying, being buried, and afterwards carrying on with life by the living, had changed, or rather failed to change since my childhood.

The time frame that I evoke here is that of the mid-1940s and early 1950s as this past relates to contemporary times, specifically August and September 2007, when I returned from the US to Nigeria to bury my mother in my village, Owase. This is one of the fifteen villages that constitute the township of Oka, the headquarters of the Akoko South local government in Ondo State. Owase, with an estimated population of about 5,000 people, has a Yoruba culture that is representative of the Akoko people in both the north and south local

* I wish to thank my colleagues in the departments Psychology and Philosophy for their invaluable help, notably Amy Rogers who provided references on parapsychology, and Stephen Taylor and Susan West whom I consulted on issues bearing on philosophy. My sociologist friend, Yaw Ackah, though scandalized by my pretentious incursion into his field, nonetheless dismissed with amused levity my cheeky excuse about territorial transgression being the only remaining battleground for scholars to cultivate the virtue of interdisciplinary courage. He carefully read my draft, providing insightful comments.

governments of Ondo State, one of the seven states comprising an estimated 40 million Yoruba people who occupy the south-west region of Nigeria, a country of about 120 million inhabitants. The Yorubas also populate the Benin Republic, Nigeria's western neighbour that has over two million people. The Yoruba language is spoken, and its culture practised, by sizeable populations outside Africa, notably in Brazil, Cuba and the US. These include people who are descendants of Yoruba slaves who inherited and have held on to the culture like the *Oyotunji Oyotitun* community in North Carolina, USA, as well as those who had no Yoruba background but have embraced the culture. Among the latter are Diasporan priests and priestesses of Yoruba deities who hold periodic religious conferences in the Americas and in Africa. Although a high level of homogeneity characterizes Yoruba culture worldwide, local variations in the spoken language and cultural traditions are common. Thus, for instance, while the fundamental religious, philosophical and social principles of the funeral tradition are the unifying elements in the Yoruba culture as a whole, its practice in given localities like my village can vary, though not significantly enough to be classified as non-Yoruba.[1]

My focus in this chapter, however, is not about the regional variations within the homogeneity of the Yoruba funeral tradition; rather, it is about the considerably less ambitious task of comparing contemporary funeral ceremonies in Owase, with what existed during the late 1940s and early 1950s. What I hope to demonstrate is that although much appears to have changed in this period of over sixty years, paradoxically, the culture, except for negligible superficialities, has remained the same. Indeed it seems as if a reverse process has been at work whereby, instead of tradition being modernized, modernity is being traditionalized. In other words, instead of the Yoruba funeral culture being Westernized, it has appropriated Western funeral and business cultural elements to enrich itself. This, I believe, is the dominant tendency when cultures previously alien to one another interact, whether forcibly or voluntarily. Thus, modernization amounts to the usual habit of cultures to judiciously borrow selected elements from alien cultural modes or technological innovations so as to update themselves in order to preserve their distinctive qualities— their essential nature as unique cultures. This is how all cultures grow; cultures that fail to borrow ossify and crumble. This, of course, is not a new thesis; but it is a necessary reminder, especially now in the age of globalization, as we

[1] For comparison of the Oka funeral with that of the Ijebus, another Nigerian Yoruba population, located four states and about 150 miles away from Oka, see "The Funeral Passage" (Drewal 1992: 38–50). On page 33 of the same chapter titled "The Ontological Journey", Drewal points out the survival of the Yoruba religion in Brazil and Cuba, a fact Wole Soyinka, who affirms on the basis of evidence that the Yoruba gods "travel well", had earlier established in the mid-seventies in his book *Myth, Literature and the African World* (see pp. 1, 16–18, 54).

urgently need to learn the language of compromise for negotiating our cultural, economic and political differences—differences that will not simply disappear just because we have suddenly become neighbours in a global village.[2]

Judging from my recent observation of the kind of changes that have occurred in the funeral practices in my own village in the span of sixty-plus years, it seems to me that the Yoruba culture of Owase is in no danger of losing its essential qualities despite the stupendous speed at which globalization is exporting Western modernity. If Owase in my youth was separated from neighbouring villages by respectable distances of woodlands and farmlands, today those distances have been swallowed up by family homes, commercial establishments like banks, gas stations, cottage industries, provincial hotels, motels and restaurants, and by government- and privately-owned facilities like post offices, police stations, hospitals and schools. Oka is no longer a town separated into fifteen distinct villages, but one huge urban settlement sprawling across its uneven landscapes of rocky hills, rivers and valleys and lusciously green vegetation.

The homes built in the last twenty years are radically different from those of my youth. Some of the new homes, architecturally designed with decorative shrub hedges or wrought iron artwork gates and fences, and tasteful interior decors, would amaze even the most hard-to-please Westerner. They are often enhanced with imports from the Western housing fashion by their *nouveau-riche* inhabitants. Most of the recent buildings, however, are modest, compact and tastefully designed bungalows owned by the working middle class, businessmen, teachers, bank clerks and local government council employees. These houses are now the norm for all new builders, rich and poor alike.

Despite the signs of globalization evident all over, Oka is still a town at the beginning of its physical transformation. Hence ugliness sometimes mars the beauty of its naturally picturesque landscape. Cell phones, for instance, proliferate and calls are frequently placed to distant places, including overseas; but these are often made from makeshift plank platforms that disfigure the streets and the houses in front of which they are erected. Also, since Oka has no piped water, bore-wells, fitted with solar power pumps store water in small elevated metal tanks, which disfigure the skyline. The footpaths that connected the villages in my youth are now replaced with motorable roads. But these are either unpaved or are coated with a thin layer of tar, which easily washes away

[2] Anthony Appiah's 1992 book, *In My Father's House*, whose anti-essentialism philosophically justifies the demise of colonized, oppressed cultures, provoked a controversy that was ultimately resolved with the emergence of the corrective notion that cultures do not lose their unique identity by borrowing, since cultures generally borrow on their own terms. This corrective view is the focus of emphasis in most of the contemporary writings on multiculturalism and globalization, as is evident for example in Kelleher and Klein (1999).

during the rains, making them inaccessible. This often obstructs travel and disrupts businesses.

Two Forms of Communication: Real and Miraculous

Inadequate as the infrastructure of modernity is in Oka, it nonetheless played a major role in the preparations preceding my mother's burial. She lived beyond ninety years, and one of the blessings was that the children had enough time to prepare for the final parting. When she took ill and my youngest brother felt that the hour was near, he telephoned me in the US. I promptly bought my return tickets and waited the next couple of days to head home. During this wait, my brother, fearing that I might not get a chance to see our mother alive because of her deteriorating health, called again. I tried to speak with her, but she was too weak and inaudible.

My brother's second call did not come as a surprise. The evening before, after dinner, I was resting in a reclining chair in my bedroom, planning to get up soon after to grade papers. But I dozed off. Suddenly, I became conscious of the presence of a tall figure draped in all white, standing before me and looking down over me, waiting for me to take notice. The instant I noticed it, I was paralyzed with fear. It required monumental will power on my part for me to lift my right hand and rapidly make the sign of the cross twice to drive off what I feared was an enemy presence. The figure quickly stepped backwards and slowly faded. After I regained my composure, my thoughts went to my mother. I was certain now that it was she who had come visiting in order to fulfil a promise.

One afternoon in 1984, I was mowing grass in the backyard of the house where I lived with my family then as a faculty member at the University of Benin, Nigeria. My wife suddenly came out into the yard, asked me to stop mowing and to come quickly into the house. Sensing the urgency and seriousness in her tone, I followed her as she went straight into my bedroom. As I stepped in, instant fear gripped me and my head became heavy. The wall on the side of the bed, where I usually slept, was thickly covered with a mass of black ants that were not moving, but seemed to be silently observing me. What my wife had felt, quickly dawned on me as well: such a sea of ants could not have naturally appeared on the wall of a room, which I had left only a short while earlier. There were no cracks or holes anywhere in the brick wall, or ceiling or windows through which they could have entered. The walls were plastered with cement before painting. The floor, bare and uncarpeted, was a concrete slab, also plastered and shining smooth with cement. We knew instantly that this was an omen. It was little surprise therefore when news arrived the next day that my sister had bled to death following a difficult breech delivery.

After my sister's burial, I shared this experience with my mother, and by way of comparison and reaffirmation, she sorrowfully traded narratives of her own personal experiences of receiving ominous signs of imminent, or already occurred, deaths of close relatives. Listening to her reminded me of several occasions in my youth when I had heard similar narratives, not only in our family circle, but also in those of others. After this conversation twenty-three years ago, I earnestly pleaded with my mother not to break tradition, but to unfailingly inform me, as my sister had done, wherever I might be when it was time for her to start her journey to join our ancestors.

Belief in the transmission of communication from the dying or the dead to the living through extra-normal media is still a strong element of the worldview of the Yoruba people, not only of my village, town and region, but of a substantial number throughout the world. So are the related beliefs in the existence of spirits and ghosts, and in the validity of the *Ifa* divination, belief in reincarnation and other marvellous realities, regularly and carelessly tossed into the waste basket as superstitious garbage by scientifically-minded people. Though the Yoruba mind, traditional or modern, is not unscientific, it finds it quite easy to reconcile the marvellous with the concretely real because, as scholars have repeatedly pointed out, the Yoruba mind operates under the assumptions of a cosmological conception that represents the worlds of the living, the dead, and the yet unborn as one world, fluidly wrapped into a unified common space. Traffic and communication between these intertwined worlds are not only possible and enhanced, but occur all the time. Hence death among the Yorubas is not an end but only a transition from the visible world to the invisible world, both of which coexist in the same intertwined space.[3]

This is why we speak to the corpses of the dead, believing that they are alive and can see and hear us. Not a few of our relatives, for instance, at my mother's viewing, spoke earnestly with her, reminding her, for instance, how fervently she had daily prayed for her favourite daughter-in-law, my youngest brother's wife, who has had problems with conception and child bearing. My mother was solemnly urged to become the answer to her own prayers since, empowered now through transition, she could choose to quickly reincarnate as a child to her beloved daughter-in-law.

The validity of the primary thesis of this chapter is not contingent on the credence that the reader grants to the Yoruba metaphysical beliefs just reviewed. On the contrary, my thesis relies exclusively on the evidence of concrete and verifiable objective reality and to this realistic narrative I shall now hasten.

[3] This point is discussed in Soyinka (1976: 2–6, 10–13, 144, 149) and it is the understood philosophical premise in most of Yoruba literature with its propensity toward marvellous realism, as is evident, for instance, in the fiction of Amos Tutuola and D. O. Fagunwa and in the works of their brilliant followers such as Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan in the area of drama and Ben Okri in fiction.

Before I do so, however, I must make two small rhetorical observations. First, human history has been a progressive revelation about the nature of Existence and Reality; yet the revelation is far from complete. This truth is evident even if we consider just the perceived conflict between the scientific and religious theories about the origin of existence and human life, one of the latest being the scientific hypothesis of the Big Bang theory. Now the second observation; we also note that science and inventions—be they those of the atom and nuclear bombs or those of the cell phone or biological re-engineering of the human gene to eliminate inherited diseases—have continually revealed that power resides in nature and that we have only to discover how to understand, arrest and use it. The ancestors of today's Westerners certainly would have doubted the sanity of anyone who, before the invention of satellites and the Internet, had dared to suggest that communication was feasible between distant spaces in the universe. Such an individual would have fared badly as recently as during the Inquisition. If our history of the progressive revelation or discovery of the nature of "objective reality" is reliable, does it not then suggest that we are not yet at the end of knowledge? Does it not also discourage cavalier and dogmatic dismissal of the so-called superstitious and heretical beliefs about the true nature of our reality, especially now that technology and capitalism have gathered us into one multilayered, intertwined, and inescapable globalized living and market space?[4]

Funeral in Owase: Globally Enhanced Tradition

Globalization and technology, which have penetrated my village, were an immediate and indispensable aspect of the rituals of my mother's funeral ceremonies. The cell phone and the e-mail made it possible for my brother to immediately communicate the urgency with which I must rush home to see our mother when it became clear that she was unlikely to recover. Within a few days, I was at my mother's side in a local clinic. Overcoming a combined attack of acute pneumonia and malaria, her health improved dramatically. At the end of the week of my stay, she was discharged from the hospital and I returned to my home in the US, confident that she would be alright.

That was wishful thinking. Three weeks after my return to the US, my mother's health took a turn for the worse, rapidly deteriorated and within twenty-four hours, she passed away. Her death and funeral would have been vastly different from what they turned out to be, had it not been for

[4] Despite its relative longevity and continued spread in the Western academia, parapsychology is yet to be universally acknowledged as a true science and is being still dismissed as superstition of unscientific cultures. See, for instance, Broughton (1991); Hess (1993); Wright (2001); Servadio (1966); and Honorton (1976). Also of relevance, is Stevenson (1975).

global technology: the telephone network not only alerted me to this crisis, but helped me to routinely monitor its progress; the cell phone and the e-mail through which we daily, sometimes more than once in a day, discussed funeral arrangements and ironed out disagreements; the Western Union and the banks through which I effected timely transfer of funds; the technologies of modern intercontinental travel such as Internet ticket booking, airports with self-check-in computers that issue boarding passes, etc.—all of which made it possible for me to swiftly travel home twice within a month from the US to Nigeria; the digital and video cameras and recording devices with which a cousin documented an interview centred on extended family history with my mother four days before her death, and with which almost every aspect of her funeral ceremonies was recorded after she had breathed her last.

Since many families in Oka, as in all Yoruba towns in Nigeria, now have close relatives scattered around the world, my experience is not unique but merely one of many such experiences. In other words, the contemporary Yoruba funeral has been somewhat globalized. What remains to be done in the rest of this chapter is to intimately interrogate the character of this global influence on the Yoruba funeral through examination of the core elements of this tradition as practised in Owase village so as to discover its present essential nature through comparison with its past.

The announcement of a death, preservation of the corpse, preparation of the body for viewing and interment, preparation of the place for interment, the religious rituals and secular ceremonies during and after interment are the universal aspects of a funeral. These aspects in respect to my mother's funeral will be discussed through the prism of the influences exerted by three separate but interrelated and collaborative, yet sometimes competing major actors—the family, the community and the religious establishment.

Traditionally, Owase people distinguish between two types of death—the sudden and the timely. The former is mourned and the burial is concluded as expeditiously as possible so as to quickly put the tragedy behind. The latter, on the other hand, is protracted to maximally celebrate the passing of a venerable and beloved member of the community. The death of one who reaches a respectable old age, generally determined by longevity and the status of an elder, is regarded as a timely death. The elder status is conferred by a general consensus on the individual who evinces knowledge of community history, wisdom, dignity, respectability and usually successful leadership of a household of extended family comprising wives, children, grand- and great-grandchildren, brothers and their wives, nephews and nieces. Those who die at a respectable age are buried inside their houses, or some place inside their compound. Their interment is accompanied by rituals appropriate to the traditional religious beliefs of the deceased. Such burials are regarded as celebration and are accompanied by extensive feasting and dancing. The magnitude of feasting is dependent on

the wealth of the family of the deceased. Those who die without reaching this level of social respectability and achievement, especially children and teenagers, are treated as premature deaths and are hurriedly buried without ceremonies in a designated land or cemetery, but in unmarked spots in grounds that are soon overgrown with tall weeds, shrubs and trees. Inevitably, this distinction often generates the association of dying well and not dying well, dying fulfilled and dying unfulfilled. Traditional prayers, therefore, usually involve pleas for dying well at a respectable old age.

My mother had for some time been the oldest person in our village. So when she passed away at ninety, celebration was clearly what tradition required, and since in the view of the community she had been judged a successful woman by virtue of two of her three sons being university professors—one teaching at home, the other abroad— sumptuous feasting was the general expectation. We, the children, knew that more than we could afford would be expected from us at every juncture. However, we intended to do our very best, but not more, and that certainly we did not want to transform our mother's burial ceremony into a show off. In order to seem successful, vain individuals have been known to extravagantly lavish money, most of it borrowed from banks, for their parents' funeral, only to live in debt for years afterwards. We followed our resolve, nonetheless we ended up spending more than planned because funeral expenses are myriad and however carefully one planned ahead, there are always unanticipated expenses that one has to incur. When it was over, the community felt that we had befittingly honoured the memory of our mother.

Deciding when and where to bury our mother was no easy matter either. It was complicated by a range of conflicting interests. One alternative was to bury her immediately after her death in early August, 2007, with minimal expenses, and then appoint a future date for the obligatory community celebration and entertainment. This is what most people do as tradition calls for burying the dead immediately. Also, this practice makes it possible for the bereaved to allow themselves of the liberty to postpone the community ceremony for as long as possible, sometimes for several years. This was not an appealing alternative to me and my siblings, given that in the end it would almost double our expenses. The preferred alternative was to put off her burial till December 2007, when we could combine the dual expenses and save costs and time, as well as minimize for me the inconvenience of making multiple international trips. This required keeping our mother in the mortuary, something that the local community, including our mother, had looked upon as alien and undesirable. Moreover, it also required seeking permission of the Roman Catholic Church, whose rigid stipulation is to bury the dead within a maximum of one month from the date of death. This meant burying our mother at the latest by 7 September since she died on 7 August. Abiding by this stipulation entailed disrupting my teaching, since the fall session would have started. It would also impose great financial

difficulties because we did not have sufficient funds to shoulder the required funeral expenses that soon without incurring debts. We appealed to the parish priest who sympathized with us but said he did not have the authority to grant an extension, which could only be given by the bishop of the diocese. We placed our case before the bishop both indirectly through influential intermediaries, and directly through an international personal call that I placed. The bishop too sympathized but refused to break rule that had been carefully considered before it was made. Besides, granting an extension would require granting it in the future to others because every extension seeker always seems to have a compelling case. This was not to mention that it would be unfair to those, including ordained people in religious service, who previously had been denied the extension.

We found ourselves in a quandary, and out of frustration we started considering desperate measures. Given their belief in a supreme Deity who manifests Himself through a multiplicity of minor deities, the Yorubas traditionally enjoy considerable freedom in choosing religious affiliations and even, sometimes, in practising more than one faith. It is not unusual in my village, for instance, for the votaries of Ogun (god of iron) to celebrate with the advocates of Oroke during that deity's annual festival. Oroke, the benign patron god of the Owase community, who provides protection and also ensures fertility of harvest and child bearing, resides at a reassuring proximity in the heights of the rock mountain that bears his name. The Yorubas embrace imported faiths with the same religious freedom and accommodativeness, and hence it was that our mother, a devoted Catholic convert, had two children who shared her Catholic belief while two others belonged to two separate faiths—the Celestial Church and the Deeper Life Congregation. While she was alive, our mother frequently worshiped with these children in their different churches without experiencing any religious conflict or discomfort. So it was suggested that, since the Catholic Church would not cooperate with our request for time extension to bury our mother, we could have her funeral service officiated separately or jointly by the evangelist of the Celestial Church or/and the pastor of the Deeper Life.[5]

The issues became more complicated, however, because our mother, though a Catholic, had expressed her desire that she did not want to be buried anywhere but her home. This preference was a factor of several considerations on her part. The local church cemetery, with its past history of unmarked graves, evoked a negative association with the village's common burial ground for those who did not die well, i.e prematurely. Assurances that her grave would be marked and permanently preserved if she were buried in the church

[5] A fascinating instance of Yoruba religious accommodativeness is pictorially recorded by Drewal (1992: 50). The picture is of a Yoruba tomb simultaneously decorated with symbols of two religions—the traditional masks of ancestor worship and a Muslim writing board with Arabic script.

cemetery failed to persuade her to change her mind. Perhaps she had also heard stories of the abomination committed in parts of the country by faithless beings who desecrate the dead by raiding their graves. I suspected, however, that our mother's Yoruba worldview was far more deeply entrenched than her Catholicism, and hence she had preferred even in death to be located, like all her ancestors, closer to home with her family. As a Yoruba, she evidently shared the belief that death is merely a transition that permits the dead to enjoy cohabitation, though unseen, in the same space, the same world, with the living. What then could be better in this circumstance for a dead Yoruba than to be buried in the same family space inhabited by the surviving children? This, no doubt, was one of the considerations for my mother's persistent demand that I build a more decent home than the one in which we lived. I complied with her request, but unfortunately the house could not be completed before she died.

It was clear then that we had to bury our mother in the new house. After sober reflection, we also overcame our frustration with the refusal of the Catholic Church to bend its rule to grant us time extension. After all what was important was respecting our mother's wishes. Since she had preferred to be a Catholic, we decided to beat the odds to give her a Catholic burial. We also concluded that she, who had loved us without bounds, would understand our predicament and forgive us for not being able to honour her wishes by preserving her remains in a mortuary to await interment.

Exactly a month after our mother died, she was taken to the Catholic church for the funeral mass, which was conducted mostly in the Yoruba language, though English was frequently used since the congregation included non-Yoruba speaking visitors. The choir also sang mostly in Yoruba and they and the congregation moved in rhythmic dance to the sound of music dominated by the drum, though Western percussion instruments contributed beats to the rhythm. After the church service, our mother's mortal remains was taken to her yet to be completed new home, accompanied by the priest and congregation for the final burial rites which the priest, though a non-Yoruba Nigerian, again conducted in Yoruba, which he spoke fluently. Pall bearing had been contracted to the local unit of a nationwide business guild. Its uniformed employees, with their choreographed movements, drumming, dancing and singing provided admirable entertainment. This made me reminisce, not about their Western business affiliations, but about the tradition of pall bearing in Owase in my youth. Pallbearers in those days were unpaid village youth who amazed and thrilled spectators with the speed, acrobatic vigour and rhythm of their dance as they circled the public square, dexterously balancing aloft the corpse over their shoulders and heads, and tirelessly entertaining in joyous celebration of a life that had been well lived. Though the present pallbearers reminded one of Westernization because of their uniform and business consciousness, the models of excellence that they aspired to were clearly not the quiet, self-

effacing pallbearers at churches and graveyards as in the Western world, but the traditional local pallbearers of my youth whose beauty of performance was a dream. Thus, although Western business corporate sensibility has to a degree permeated the practice of pall bearing in Owase, its ideal remains traditional—to entertain—a purpose that would be frowned upon as a desecration of a reverential ritual in the West.

My mother's funeral consisted of three continuous days of entertainment, celebration and feasting, and paramount among all these were the indigenous cultural elements of language, song and dance. On Thursday, 6 September, 2007, during the night of the viewing when the bands of the two Christian churches played in tandem all night, first the Catholic and later the Deeper Life, their Christian messages were subordinated to the entertainment spirit of the local tradition through emphasis on indigenous rhythmic dance music. The finai ceremony was on Friday, 7 September, at the nearby local high school. The soccer field, dotted with rolls of tarpaulin tents, was transformed into an arena of hour-long entertainment with music and dancing, eating and drinking. The open space between the tents witnessed captivating dancing by a substantial population of Owase village and visitors from various other quarters of Oka township. Dressed in colourful formal Yoruba attire, group after group of age associations, known as *omo egbe,* and their supporters trooped in ordered succession into the arena to accompany the individual child, grandchild, or relative that belonged to the specific *egbe* accompanying him or her to celebrate the life of our deceased mother.

Beginning from teenage, every adult in Owase belongs to an *egbe*, the age group organisation in traditional societies whose social structure and functions have been much elaborated by anthropologists and whose dramatic and thematic values have also been exploited frequently by African novelists.[6] Suffice it to note here that in Owase, regular (usually weekly) as well as emergency meetings for deliberating on the group's and community issues are a primary feature of the *egbe* organization. Since a major purpose of the *egbe* is to assist its members in meeting social expectations during important moments of life like a wedding, building a house, and bereavement, members regularly contribute to a standing fund from which they can draw at such moments. Participation in one's *egbe* is compulsory, regardless of one's social status or level of education. From the day of its inauguration, I have been an active member of my own group, called *Egbe Kaiyero*, and have remained so even though the exigencies of educational and professional life have since relocated me outside the village, at first to other parts of the country and in the last seventeen years outside the country. Since the relocation, I have continued to pay all dues and participate in all events by proxy as my younger brother, apart from full involvement in his

[6] See, for instance, Laye (1970) and Armah (1973), both of which dramatically depict an African age group initiation ceremony.

own *egbe*, represents me in all aspects of my group's obligations. Consequently, members of my *egbe* as well as those of my siblings played active roles at our mother's funeral.

As the *egbe* supporters danced to the melodious rhythms, they displayed financial assistance by showering money in various denominations of the *naira* (the local currency) on the foreheads or garments of the bereaved individuals they were supporting. Although this act, known as *imari* or spraying, is often converted into an arrogant public display of wealth, it is a specifically Yoruba tradition of doing honour to an individual. While this went on, participants entertained one another and the spectators, dancing rhythmically and beautifully, to the beats of a paid band that worked, producing music from noon till dusk.

On Saturday, 8 September, we experienced entertainment of a different kind. Following tradition, the women who were either the wives of the mostly polygamous males in my father's family, or the daughters of the family who had married out, both of which groups are known as *opansin,* returned to live for seven days in my mother's house. The purpose of this tradition is to lend support to the bereaved. Besides, they also play the role of entertainers by singing and dancing in order to bring into the bereaved home the cheer that would help reduce the pain of loss. This role is especially crucial in instances when death is premature or tragic. In return for this kindness, the children of the deceased provide money for the women's feeding throughout the period of their stay. In our case, the musical entertainment that the *opansin* had been providing since 6 September when they arrived had been drowned by the noise of the playing bands. The melodious and choric beauty produced by the simple instruments of *shekere* (beaded gourd), rhythmic hand-clapping, foot-stomping and modulated voices, which had previously been submerged, finally burst into prominence on 8 September after the departure of the bands. Periodically, the women were moved to dancing and how entertainingly they executed their movements!

OWASE FUNERAL: ITS SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

It was not until the climactic conclusion of the funeral ceremony on Saturday, 8 September, that the full meaning of the Owase Yoruba funeral unambiguously established itself. This climax consisted of two parts, the *ipade egbe (*age group meetings) conducted in the afternoon and the *irohun* held in the evening. *Irohun* is the funeral ceremony of rendering accounts and it has two stages. In the first stage, the children and relatives of the deceased give an account to the community of how they had carried out the stipulations of the burial tradition as laid down in the village. In the second stage, members of the community as

well as outsiders give testimonies of their experiences and encounters with the deceased while he or she was living.

The traditional conclusion of a funeral in the village includes inviting one's *egbe* for a thanksgiving feast at one's home. We hosted three such feasts in the afternoon of Saturday, 8 September. My group used the occasion to thank me for my dedication and commitment and for the generosity of the feast, but also wished me to understand that they expected more from a person of my status. Though now every household in the village has at least a graduate, the village wants many more of its children to go to the university here at home, but preferably abroad, especially in the United States where I now teach. Right now, it was said, a number of our children are experiencing difficulties gaining admission. Help is needed here as well as in assisting those who have graduated in securing appropriate employment, and in going as high as I have gone in education. They also needed me, they informed me, to think of establishing a business here that would employ them or their children. In my response, I expressed joy at the progress the community was making, pointed out my limitations in meeting some of their requests, but promised to do whatever way I could help.

In the evening, the village community assembled for the *irohun*, the traditional conclusion of a burial, in front of my father's house, which is situated to the north-west of the village square, the scene of a similar assembly twenty years earlier during my father's funeral. Seated sedately under the canopy in chairs on one side were the village elders whose demeanours resembled those of superior court judges sitting in judgment at the court. The importance and seriousness of the occasion could not escape even the most casual observer, given the dignified posture and sober mood of the assembled elders. On the other side of the canopied space, seated on long benches, were my siblings, my mother's relations from our village, other villages of Oka township, and also from other towns, some of them far away. Also seated and standing were the village people who were going to participate in the proceedings or who had simply come to observe.

The deliberations commenced with the oldest male child of the deceased, in this case me, being summoned to come forward to stand as the representative of the family before the village, represented by its elders. I advanced to the designated place and faced the elders. "You have asked the community to assemble," a spokesman of the elders began. "We are here now. Why have you called us?"

Indeed, observing tradition, I had earlier sent for the town crier and instructed him to assemble the village. As he went round the village streets, beating his gong, I heard him loudly announcing that the children of Jogbodo Balogun had requested the village to assemble in the early evening. In the past, the town crier performed this duty as a free public service, although relatives

of the deceased usually voluntarily entertained him with food, drinks and a gift of kola nuts. This evidently had changed because the crier, on arriving to my summons, told me upfront in the gentle and polite manner characteristic of Owase people, that his services required payment. Tilting his head to reveal a pleasant, humorously roguish, smiling face, he jovially added: "Since you're a big man, I bet I and my family will eat quite well this coming week!" His was a familiar face, being a member of my age group association. I retorted: "In that case, I now know where I will go daily for my meals since the funeral has already turned me into a pauper!" As if he had expected my response, he instantly said, smiling, "That's good, very good. It means we all will eat even better now that you will be paying for two services—the town crier's and the catering!" We both laughed hilariously as he departed, setting out to perform his duty. This episode flipped through my mind as I prepared to answer the elder's formal question even though everybody already knew why we had assembled.

"I give honour to our chief, His Highness Olowase; I pay respect to our elders; and I greet the people of Owase," I began with a formal greeting, adding: "With your kind permission and support, for which I and my family are most grateful, we performed yesterday the burial ceremony of our departed mother, Mrs Mary Arabi Jogbodo Balogun. The burial was followed by public entertainment and celebration, which you either participated in or have heard reports of. Today, we wish to bring the funeral to a befitting close with the traditional *irohun*. This is why my siblings and I have requested Owase people to assemble. We are grateful that you have come."

"We have heard you," the community spokesman began in response, "but we wish to know if you have come with empty hands to an assembly that you have called."

"No, not at all," I replied. "Our late mother and our late father taught us better than to do that. We have come with the traditional kegs of palm wine, bags of salt, and a cow for slaughter and sharing by the men and women of Owase. In addition, we have also provided the finest assortments of foreign drinks." Here, I stopped briefly for the items I had listed to be produced and placed before the assembly, except for the cow that everybody had already seen tethered to a nearby shady tree. "We also brought the traditional monetary gifts, and because you more than deserve it, we have added extra to each of these gifts." After my statement, I handed over separate sums of money to the required personages: the village chief, the elders, the women of the village, the village secretary, the drummer, the town crier, the spokesman, and the people of *Okedaporo*, my clansmen and women.

At this point, a spokesman for the *Okedaporo* clan requested the assembly for permission to speak. His request was granted and he proceeded to state that the clan appreciated the gift, but that in conforming to the recent revision of the village's tradition of funeral gifts, the cow should belong to the clan rather than

to the village. He was therefore informing the assembly that the clan rejected the monetary gift and would accept nothing less than the cow that was due to it. In my childhood, when the village was smaller, the monetary gifts were smaller and the animal gift, shared by the village households, was a pig. As a result of population growth, the animal gift changed from a pig to a cow. More recently, even the cow had become too small to be shared by all the households; therefore, it was resolved that henceforth the cow gift would be presented to the clan of the family doing the burial, while the village would be content with receiving only a monetary gift. This gift goes into the village's common purse for taking care of village business, such as paying the cost of legal suits on land disputes, or advancing an education loan to a promising local student. I recognized the logic of this explanation, but it was too late for it would have been shameful to withdraw the cow gift from the village to hand it over to my clan. I resolved the dilemma by promising to buy a separate cow for the clan, a promise that I have since fulfilled. In addition to these cows, I had purchased four others, two for entertainment at the post-burial public celebration, and two for the various *egbe*s as well as the stream of condolence visitors.

At this juncture, the village spokesman once again took over control by thanking me and my siblings for our generosity which, according to him, was no surprise, given the well-known generosity of the mother who had brought us up and for whom we were doing the present honour. It was also well known in the village, he added, that we have been good children and had taken very good care of both our late father and our recently departed mother. Moreover, none of us, he stated, owed the village any social debt or obligation, beginning with our departed mother who had duly buried both her parents according to tradition, just as we had also done in respect to our father. It was for these reasons, according to him, three days ago when my siblings had sought the village's permission to bury our mother, the permission had been given without delay. "You know well enough what would have happened with your request had any of you been found deficient in meeting your obligations to your parents or the community," he weightily said, stopping to speak for a moment to allow the ensuing silence to lend additional emphasis to his observation for the benefit of all present, especially the young people watching the deliberation.

It was the tradition in the village for any child who neglected to take care of his or her parents while they were living to be heavily fined a monetary penalty, a penalty the child must pay before being allowed to bury the deceased parent. Similarly, if an individual fails to perform the formal traditional burial for a dead parent and he or she wishes to bury a recently departed parent, the individual would face sanctions. The options before such an individual would either be to find the extra money to do double formal traditional burial for both parents, which would be very expensive, or to seek permission to carry out the minor immediate burial of the recently dead parent and to postpone to a later date

the formal traditional burial for the two parents. Should a person die before doing the traditional burial of a parent, the children of the delinquent deceased would first have to perform the ceremony in respect of the grandparent on behalf of the dead parent before he or she is allowed to do the formal burial of the parent. These were the thoughts that the spokesman wished the audience to ponder over during the momentary silence he kept while he was speaking. Convinced that his implied meaning was well understood, he resumed his role as the master of ceremonies.

"Before we proceed further in this ceremony," the spokesman said, "there is however one issue for which the village seeks explanation." He paused for a while before adding: "The age group of your brother, the university lecturer, has informed the village that he does not participate in their meetings or activities and that this was the reason his *egbe* had not joined him, as you, your sister, and the other brother were joined by your respective age groups, to officially participate in the events of this burial. If we did not know your brother to be a good person, a good son, a good husband, a good father and grandfather, and a good uncle who has most diligently carried out his obligations in regard to his parents, his in-laws, his wife, daughter, granddaughter, nieces, nephews, friends and neighbours, this information would not have surprised us. But we are surprised. What can be responsible for this oddity?"

Having concluded, he moved aside, expecting me to speak, but I stated that my brother was in the best position to explain the matter. Earlier in the day, a friend of the family had intimated us that this issue would be raised at the *irohun* assembly, so we were prepared ahead with an explanation. The main reason why my brother was not involved in the activities of his age group was because his religious denomination, the Deeper Life, frowned upon such involvement. During our private deliberation as to what would be an appropriate explanation, we agreed that the religious excuse would not go down well with the community as it goes directly against Yoruba traditional religious accommodativeness. Religion, as known in the village, promotes community involvement rather than disuniting people. We, therefore, agreed that he should omit it altogether and instead stress upon the minor reasons of distance from home, too much commitment and responsibilities associated with his work and family. We also knew that this explanation by itself would not stand since other professionals in a similar situation as his do participate in their age group organizations, even by proxy when necessary. Because of this, he was to emphasize the point that, though he had not been active in his age group association, he had, with commitment, consistently promoted the interest of the Owase community. He was to add that several people in the assembly could bear witness to the truth of his claim. This was because not only had many of their children gained admissions to his and other universities and colleges of education as a result of his intervention, but that he was also currently helping many admission

seekers from the community. We knew that even this explanation would not work because the village was already aware of this fact, which constituted the reason for the lenient treatment he was receiving rather than the normal harsh sanction. The real reason behind bringing up this issue at the assembly was to influence my brother to make a commitment of future participation in his age group organization, a central instrument in the village's governance designed to promote civic involvement, communal spirit, the ethics of mutual collaboration, mutual support and leadership, among others. Nothing short of making such a commitment would be acceptable to the village, which might thus be forced to impose a sanction, even though it had no interest in doing so because each one of my mother's children, including the one under interrogation, enjoyed a good reputation in the community. Either because my brother wanted to save us from the embarrassment of an impending community sanction, or he actually recognized and accepted, albeit reluctantly, the logic in the position of the village, his explanation to the assembly concluded with a commitment of future participation in his age group organization. The village was pleased.[7]

Having resolved the age group issue, the assembly went to the next item of the *irohun* ritual. This involved providing an account of what had been contributed for burying the dead. Tradition demands for all relatives of the deceased to contribute materials, such as cloths and coffin for the burial. Since only one coffin is needed and only so much cloth can be used in burying an individual, relations who have not provided burial materials are expected to contribute a designated amount of money in lieu of these items. The contributions thus collected are treated as a help to the children of the deceased and are given to them. I informed the assembly that my mother's four children and some of her grandchildren had provided the materials in which she was buried. Thereafter, I was requested to identify my mother's relatives who subsequently came up family by family before the assembly to give monetary contributions in lieu of burial materials. Before they did this, however, they also had to first give a token money gift to each of the same categories of individuals and groups that I had previously gifted: the village chief, the elders, the village women, secretary, drummer, town crier, the women and men constituting the *Okedaporo* clan, and the master of ceremonies/spokesman for the occasion.

The proceeding continued without a hitch until the representative of a family that should have been one of our closest relations approached the assembly to meet their obligation. My other brother swiftly got up at this point and informed the assembly that we, the children of the deceased, no longer acknowledged the family in question as relations on account of the fact that members of that family had long ceased to behave as such. He demonstrated his

[7] For other types of Yoruba communal associations that may or may not be based on age, see Daramola and Jeje (1975). This is a Yoruba text whose title translates as Yoruba Customs and Deities.

claim by citing the fact that none of the members of the family in question had paid a visit to our mother while she was sick even though they had been aware of her condition. He added that, worse than this, a member of that family had in fact visited a patient in the same hospital where our mother was receiving treatment and this individual, though aware of the room where our mother was, had left the hospital without even briefly stepping into the room to greet our mother. "Only enemies behave this way, not family," my brother concluded. The assembly spokesman, after consulting with the elders, remarked that it was not a small matter to severe family tie, and that the assembly wished to know if my brother was speaking in behalf of all his mother's children. We confirmed that he had spoken for us, and the assembly then barred the said family from participating in the *irohun* process.

The fag end of the *irohun* proceeding consisted of individuals who came up to the assembly and declared that, though they were no relations of the deceased, they nonetheless felt compelled to participate in the capacity of relations on account of how my mother, while alive, had deeply and positively touched their lives through her acts of kindness, generosity, sacrifice, love and sometimes humanism. These individuals, mostly women, then proceeded to briefly narrate the details of their experiences. The accounts were quite moving, especially one, which refused to fade away was given by a woman. With deep emotions of grief, she told the story of how her only child, an infant, was taken ill and given up for dead, when my mother happened to come by and seeing the child's condition, decided it must not be allowed to die. She took over the care of the sick child and, with deep devotion nursed the baby as if it were her own until it gradually started to recover. "I know that without your mother," the woman passionately said, "I would be a childless woman today!" I had always known my mother to be a good, caring, loving and a deeply humane person, but I had never been as emotionally pleased with her and proud of her as I was, listening this evening to these testimonies that further deepened my conviction that nothing in life is as valuable as being a good person. It was reassuring to learn that many others, including those I was meeting for the first time, shared my view of her.

CONCLUSION

What has become clear to me since experiencing my mother's funeral is that the Owase Yoruba funeral tradition is not merely a physical necessity to bury, part with, and celebrate the departed relative. In this culture, the funeral is a crucial social mechanism whose core purpose is cultural self-perpetuation and self-preservation through social control. It is a mechanism that has an inbuilt quality of flexibility and accommodativeness that allows it to absorb alien cultural elements as long as its core principles are not compromised.

This is evident in its accommodation of the cultural traits of Westernization and globalization such as the cell phone and the Catholic rituals, while it conservatively refuses to compromise on the primacy of participation in the village age group organization. It is also obvious that the funeral in Owase is an economic mechanism for wealth production, management and redistribution, given the facts that one has first to work to earn and save money in order to take care of one's relations while alive and give them a befitting burial at death. Aside from its economic function and its civic role of whipping the community into conformity through the use of sanctions, the Owase funeral serves to promote highly positive social, ethical and moral ideals, such as social cohesion, strong family ties, acceptance of moral responsibilities owed to one's parents, family and the community. Similarly, it upholds humane virtues such as kindness, generosity, selfless service to others as models of personal behaviour. There is no doubt that this Owase tradition will continue to adapt by absorbing alien cultural elements, but as its history in the past sixty years has shown, any changes it makes will be on its own terms. This is how all vibrant cultures grow and adapt.

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6

Multilingualism in Modern South African Poetry

MANFRED LOIMEIER
University of Heidelberg, Germany

After the official end of institutionalized apartheid, the Republic of South Africa agreed on eleven official languages. In the order of importance by percentage of speakers in the total population, these are: isiZulu (22.4 per cent), isiXhosa (17.5 per cent), Afrikaans (15.1 per cent), Sepedi (9.8 per cent) English (9.1 per cent), Setswana (7.2 per cent), Sesotho (6.9 per cent), Xitsonga (4.2 per cent), siSwati (2.6 per cent), Tshivenda (1.7 per cent) and isiNdebele (1.5 per cent). With the exception of Zulu and Xhosa, the indigenous Bantu languages are generally only spoken in relatively large, but well-defined regions of South Africa. As a result, they cannot be regarded as national languages that are universally understood.

The other languages (totalling 1.8 per cent) include Tamil, Urdu and Hindi, the result of the immigration of Indians to South Africa. This immigration dates back to 1860, when the British government brought in contract workers for the South African sugarcane plantations on the coast of present-day KwaZulu-Natal. Today, approximately a million Indians live in South Africa, primarily in and around Pietermaritzburg and Durban as well as Cape Town. This is not only the largest Indian community in Africa, but also the largest Indian minority community outside of South Asia. Indians have played a major role in the nation's history, not to mention the role and influence of Mahatma Gandhi. By now, the socio-economic status of most Indians is almost equal to that of upper-class whites, a fact that frequently causes tension in view of the poverty seen among the black majority. As early as 1985, the increasing inclusion of coloureds[1] and Indians at high levels of government, in both the legislative and executive branches, led to violent clashes between blacks and Indians.

[1] In South Africa, "coloured" refers to a person of mixed descent. During the period of apartheid it was an official designation in terms of the Population Registration Act.

Rivalries between black and Indian store-owners can still be seen today. Many Indian names are found among physicians, attorneys and teachers in South Africa. The economic boom in the country has been most advantageous to Indian businessmen, who had already established small companies during the apartheid era. This is particularly due to the exceptional growth of trade between South Africa and India. In addition to Indians, South Africa also has several thousand Chinese, whose ancestors had settled as traders in Madagascar and Mauritius. They are generally part of the middle or upper class. In Cape Town alone, in the Malay Quarter, there are approximately 150,000 people referred to as Cape Malays, who practise Islam. Neither they nor the Chinese have a distinctive share in the multiplicity of languages.

English serves as the lingua franca in South Africa, even though only about 20 per cent of the population speak it fluently. This leaning towards English has political reasons. Afrikaans, though more widely spoken, was considered the language of apartheid. The Soweto uprising of 1976, which ended with the shooting of numerous demonstrators in the South Western Township of Johannesburg, was sparked off by government plans to force local schools to use Afrikaans as the language of instruction. By way of comparison, after South Africa's neighbour Namibia declared its independence in 1990, it instituted English as the sole official language, even though a mere 3 per cent of Namibians considered it their first language. This decision was also political, with the additional aim of preventing rivalry between the indigenous groups for language dominance.

Etymologically, Afrikaans developed as a language in South Africa. It evolved from Dutch and exhibits a highly simplified grammar. For example, there is no difference between the singular and the plural. The Afrikaans vocabulary also includes numerous expressions drawn from the Khoisan languages, as well as from Malay. Afrikaans thus reflects the early colonization history of the Cape by the Khoikhoi and the San, as well as immigration from the region around the Indian Ocean. The latter was the result of the labour market policy of the Dutch East India Company, which brought workers from Asia to South Africa. Afrikaans is still generally the first language of the so-called coloured, or mixed-race, people, especially in the Western Cape, i.e. on the Atlantic coast of South Africa.

Poet, composer and stage director Xoli Norman, who lives in Johannesburg, commented on Afrikaans: "I think Afrikaans is spoken by a greater percentage of black people than English. The so-called coloured people have infused a peculiar lyricism and beauty that makes this language a gem" (Norman 2007: 153). Apart from the political decision in its favour, English is currently also becoming established as the leading literary language of South Africa. English is especially interesting for authors in South Africa because it enables them to reach an international—indeed global—readership to an extent that Afrikaans

does not permit. Through English, South African authors can participate more actively in global dialogue. Besides, a substantially greater selection of publishing houses is available to English-language authors. The same holds true for their participation in conferences and, owing to the greater number of possible readers, for the frequency of invitations for readings in English-speaking foreign countries.

As a result, South African authors whose mother tongue is Afrikaans also publish in English. Some of them, like crime fiction writer Deon Meyer, have their books in Afrikaans translated into English soon after publication. Others, like poet and journalist Antjie Krog, translate a text even before publication and present it in English. Still others, including younger authors like Diane Awerbuck, write in English in the first place. They do so, as Awerbuck says, "although Afrikaans is actually the lingua franca of 80% of the country" (Awerbuch 2007: 63). It is the internationality of the English language that makes this advantageous. After all, Afrikaans also has a long literary tradition and a sizeable audience in South Africa.

Generational differences are evident in the use of English—not only for speakers of Afrikaans, but also for speakers of the indigenous languages. According to Xoli Norman, "The new generation speaks and writes in English, whereas my generation (bridging the old and the new South African dispensations) would most probably speak English to conduct business and other formal transactions, but would apply the African language for leisure talk" (Norman 2007: 153). Norman was born in 1964.

The growing emphasis on English has triggered an intense debate regarding language in South Africa. This debate pertains both to the preference for English as the lingua franca in South Africa and to its development into the leading language in South African literature. It is interesting to note that this development has already spurred a counter-reaction, causing speakers of other language groups to become increasingly conscious of their own languages and to call attention to them. Parallel to the growing primacy of English, for example, festivals of Afrikaans culture are becoming increasingly popular. The same holds true for the indigenous languages, which are actually profiting from the official plurality of languages, as more and more literature is being published in indigenous languages as well. This is occurring not only in single-language publications, but in multi-language yearbooks such as *Timbila* or *Botsotso*, which, though appealing to a limited circle of readers, enjoy nationwide prestige. These anthologies always include literary works in several indigenous languages. Furthermore, an increasing number of small regional publishing houses are producing books in indigenous languages.

Not all of the nine Bantu languages recognised as official languages in South Africa lend themselves to literature in modern terms. These indigenous languages do, of course, have their own oral and written literary traditions,

including songs, chants, poems, fairy tales, stories, and other works in prose. The Xhosa and Zulu literatures demonstrate an especially great variety, also including modern novels. The idea of amenability to literature referred to here relates solely to the reasons of practicality that make English the leading literary language at present: a greater target audience at home and abroad; a denser network of publishing houses; a greater concentration of critics, particularly in the media that are distributed internationally; better opportunities for translations from the English, and thus greater opportunities overall to make one's mark and become established as an author. Besides, especially in comparison with the indigenous languages used by smaller groups, English offers a richer vocabulary for describing current social phenomena.

To quote Awerbuck again, "Local languages often haven't been developed for academic purposes. Even translation is difficult because the lexicon often doesn't exist, or because there are so many geographical varieties within each language itself" (Awerbuck 2007: 63–64). And even if this were not the case, numerous reasons—not least mercantile factors—militate against the use of all the languages in South Africa as literary languages. IsiNdebele, for example, as the least widely spoken language in South Africa, is used only by about 600,000 people there. Publishing books in isiNdebele would only make sense if they were to also appear in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, whose populations include additional speakers of this language. This example alone shows that the necessary logistics would involve considerable cost, which could hardly be managed in the context of a book market that is difficult as it is, and which would leave a very meagre margin of profit for their publishers. And then there are the legal and current political difficulties that such international publication practices would involve. It is, therefore, much simpler to publish in English in order to reach as large an audience as possible and a global book market.

It is interesting to note that non-anglophone South African authors are currently utilizing English in a way that enables them to communicate the thought world of the indigenous languages, transforming it as need be. This involves the Africanization of a European language, a process that has taken place in other previously British, French or Portuguese colonies all over the world. One refers to West African French, for example, or Angolan or Mozambican Portuguese. Now that apartheid and the international isolation of South Africa have ended, a similar Africanization is also happening in English. In comparing English and Afrikaans, it is interesting to note that Afrikaans has already undergone this kind of Africanization. Also worth considering is the fact that the existing gap between single-language South Africans—i.e. those who only speak English—and the multilingual South Africans could become even greater. Due to the global use of English today, English-speaking South Africans do not have a sense of the necessity of learning other languages. Non-anglophone South Africans on the other hand are developing a very

different and much more varied language competence. They also demonstrate this language competence by integrating specific Afrikaans words, sentences or dialogues into their English-language publications. As a result, for example, three-page glossaries explaining the Afrikaans expressions that are used are included in both Awerbuck's novel *Gardening at Night* and the autobiography *Shirley, Goodness & Mercy: A Childhood in Africa* by Chris van Wyk. Even authors who have a sensitive approach to language and who primarily publish in English use a change of language as a stylistic tool and integrate Afrikaans wording to shape their characters. Passages in Afrikaans are used to identify coloureds in Damon Galgut's novel *The Quarry,* for instance, and even in the South African edition of J. M. Coetzee's novel *In the Heart of the Country,* all the dialogues set in farm life are formulated in Afrikaans.

The still rather limited Africanization of English and the openly practised multilingualism point toward a degree of mutual interpenetration of the various languages spoken in South Africa. The image of a waterfall helps to imagine this situation better. This waterfall is fed by a number of tributaries, which represent the various languages in South Africa. Although the flow of words is fed by the eleven official languages, they have not yet become totally blended. English remains the main stream, Afrikaans supplies a broad tributary, and the nine Bantu languages form a language cascade of their own, whereby some of them seem to be no more than a trickle. All the same, an occasional expression seems to flow randomly from one of these languages into another.

An increasing number of non-anglophone South African authors integrate expressions drawn from the indigenous languages into their English-language works. This vocabulary does not necessarily come from their own mother tongues; it can also stem from other indigenous languages or sociolects. Novelist K. Sello Duiker, who published three books, commented:

> English was not my mother tongue. It is an adopted language. You really have to work at making it work for you, making English relevant in an African context, in a township context. In a rhythmic tone, the way people use it. (Sello Duiker 2007: 97)

Especially interesting are the ways in which modern South African poetry—even if penned in English—can communicate the essence of the cosmology of the indigenous languages. In an initial, simple form, this means integrating words from indigenous languages or slang expressions into English texts. The young poetry performer Eddie Maluleke, for example, uses Xitsonga expressions. And poetry performer Napo Masheane from Johannesburg wrote in October 2003: "I hold the mirror of change. Ke Masechaba; through my womb nations are born ... I keep the beat in my feet, my breath sends the Unicorn, son of miracles, to mother earth. And may her beauty and grace bless us with drops of rains ... Pula! Nala!" (Masheane 2007: 97). In these four

sentences, Masheane uses words from four languages: First is English. Second, *Ke Masechaba*,which means, "I am the grandmother" in Sesotho and, in this context, the mother of the South African nation. Third is Setswana. The word *Pula* comes from this language and means rain. Used as a greeting, it means something like "May it rain!" Fourth is Swahili, an East African language. The Swahili word *Nala* stands for both "gift" and "queen". The meanings of these African words only supplement the English text and simply reinforce the comprehensible statement already made in English. At the same time, however, these words call attention to the African context of the statement, thus achieving an effect that literary scholar Chantal Zabus referred to as the palimpsest phenomenon: an additional level of meaning, which is present subliminally or between the lines of a text, and which expands the meaning of the printed text. In francophone African literature, this phenomenon is known from the novels of Ousmane Sembène from Senegal or Ahmadou Kourouma from Côte d'Ivoire. Kourouma adapted French to the grammar and syntax of the Mande people, while Sembène let the parlance of the Wolof language shine through. In Africa's anglophone literature, the Nigerian Chinua Achebe is well known for using the syntax and sayings of the Igbo to Africanize English.

This means, on the one hand, that a development that is already known elsewhere is being repeated in South Africa. On the other hand, new facets are being added, which can be described using South African spoken word poetry as an example. To return to the image of the waterfall: the spray of the language flow rushing down causes clouds of steam to form, representing additional levels of meaning to the text. Two phenomena can be observed.

First is *gestus*, or physical expression, the performance of the poem. Spoken word poetry or poetry performance means that a text is not just recited or simply read aloud. Poetry performers present their texts by illustrating them with the help of gestures, facial expression and sound, in a kind of *sprechgesang*. A number of South African poetry performers work with musicians and publish their texts on CDs rather than in books. These texts can be read, but they need to be heard—and, preferably, also seen—if they are to be completely grasped and understood. This means understanding them not only intellectually, but also gesturally and scenically.

Let me mention a few examples from CD publications: Poetry performer Lesego Rampolokeng from Johannesburg added a CD to his book of poetry entitled *Blues V's* (1998) and recorded the performance of the poems later collected in the *Endbeginnings* (1998) volume with the Kalahari Surfers music group as a CD (1993). Poetry performer Kgafela oa Magogodi published not only the poetry collections entitled *Thy Condom Come* (2000) and *Outspoken* (2004), but also the CDs *I Mike What I Like* (2004) and *Faya Works* (2006). Owing to its visual character, *I Mike What I Like* by film lecturer and director Jyoti Mistry of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg was also

produced as a film. Poetry performer Lebogang Mashile from Johannesburg published the CD *Lebo Mashile Live* (2005)—a live recording of an appearance at the Horror Café in Newtown, and poetry performer Siphiwe ka Ngwenya put out the CD *Purple Light Mirror in The Mind* (2001) with the Botsotso Jesters poets group. Rampolokeng, Mashile and Ngwenya all emphasize the musicality of their poetry. Other poetry performers, such as Magogogi, stage their appearances as shows: Kabomo Vilakazi from Johannesburg described his *Frozen Moments* as a "poetry play" (2005). As a member of the Seven Poetry Collective (in addition to Kojo, Maakomele Manaka, Ayob Vania, Thabo, Flo and Afura Khan), he also designed and produced the show *The Streets Have Lips* in 2004.

Spoken word poetry is considered in Europe to be a relatively young form of poetic expression in South Africa. This view is presumably only the result of the history of its reception and is related to the limited contact—as a result of apartheid—that other countries have with South African literature. Furthermore, the *sprechgesang* used by the spoken word poets is viewed in Europe simply as a form of hip hop or rap (South African poets are certainly influenced by these, but do not copy them). The truth, however, is that the performance of the recitation of a poem has always been an element in Zulu and Xhosa poetry, for example. There, too, the presentation of the text is a fundamental part of the performance, an integral component of its meaning. This is particularly clear when one considers the tradition of the *imbongi*, the praise singers. In 2001, South African poet and journalist Antjie Krog described these differences in the form of presentation, using her experiences immediately prior to the release of Nelson Mandela, when Krog was also asked to perform texts.

> South Africa and the continent itself have a strong oral tradition where you as a poet have to respect the audience. It was quite challenging before 1990, because you were asked to come and perform—these are the words they used with poets: come and perform—at a release Mandela rally. So you get an order to write a poem, about Mandela, which is contrary to western poetry writing where you write what you feel, when you feel, now you must go there, there are 30,000 people, black people, what do you wear, what language do you use, how do you perform—over a bad, bad microphone. Do you read from a book—more than 50% of the people are illiterate, do you bring a book with you? And you see these oral poets, they dress, they put on feathers, they wear flags—because they respect the audience. All of that has been a sort of training ground for a live performance in front of an audience. (Krog 2002: 125)

It is not surprising that Krog subsequently delved deep into African poetry and published the book *The Stars Say 'Tsau':/Xam Poetry of Dia!kwain, Kweiten-ta-//ken* (Krog 2004), in which Bushman stories and songs are arranged into verse. Using archival material by /Xam speakers from what is now western Namibia,

these poems by Krog remain true to the original text, resulting in haunting tales that tell of mythological beings, hunting and the spirits of animals.

This makes it clear that even the supposedly new phenomenon of spoken word poetry in fact builds on an African literary tradition. If the performance of a text is seen in its historical context, it can be understood on a new level. It is thus possible to communicate the essence of African thought through a poem that has been written and recited in English. In this context, individual words in African languages that are interspersed in the text are no longer simply isolated African expressions, but provide access to an additional level of meaning.

A similar effect is achieved through the rhythm of a text. In his poetry collection *Inkondlo kaZulu* (1935) (Zulu poems), Benedict Wallet Vilakazi (1906–47), an early exponent of setting down Zulu poetry in writing, already demonstrated how gracefully traditional Zulu poetry can be transcribed into European, English verse forms, so that a compatible harmony results. Vilakazi experimented with rhyme (Nyembezi 1961: 7) and developed a metric and strophic system (Jahn 1966: 113–19) aligned to English, writing an essay of his own on this subject (Vilakazi 1938). It has long since been demonstrated that Zulu poetry and English poetry can be combined. However, in addition to their own grammar and syntax, the indigenous languages of South Africa, such as Zulu, also have their own rhythm and speech melody. Since the musicality of language is a primary component of spoken word poetry, it stands to reason that the rhythm and melody alone can communicate a feeling for African narrative forms to the audience. The image of the waterfall is again useful here, along with the feeling that the sound of the water rushing down is sufficient to determine which waterfall one is hearing. The same may hold true for the performance of a South African poem—even a modern one—in English. Its rhythm and melody may be reminiscent of songs of the Xhosa culture, for example, making it possible to communicate the essence of African thought even through poems written in the English language. This method of making the traditions of African narration visible and audible remains largely inaccessible to us Europeans. This is all the more so if we, as monoglots, are not familiar with the language game practised by multilingual people, which permits a permeability of various languages.

Although the English language seems to lend itself to communicating certain contents and components of African poetry, there are also limitations that South African poetry performers make up for through code-switching. An example of this is provided by Johannesburg spoken word poet Siphiwe ka Ngwenya, who is also one of the publishers of the literary magazine *Botsotso*. It is important to know that ka Ngwenya was originally an *imbongi*, an oral or performance or praise singer. He performed at festivals, funerals, political rallies, parties, wedding., conferences, and so on.

> I write and perform in isiZulu, isiXhosa and siSwati, because they are my mother tongues. They are also rich in imagery and rhythm and orality. There are words or phrases and figures of speech which are stimulating to the mind and soul when performed in the African language. They lose their meaning when expressed in English. The switch into these languages is enriching. Sometimes it is a matter of compulsion and not choice that I switch from language to language. Most of my poems come out instantly while with the audience, which usually participates through refrains, clapping, and cheering rhythmically. I therefore married both (traditional) African poetry and western modes in passing the message. (Ka Ngwenya 2007: 105)

And the poet performer Lebo Mashile, having produced a live CD, adds: "I believe that my work is an extension of the oral tradition of poetry in South Africa. Even though I write in English, I am constantly drawing from the wells of my culture and my mother tongue when I make poems" (Mashile 2007: 133).

This underscores the fact that there are multiple possibilities—first, through the integration of words and language forms from indigenous languages; second, through the narration *gestus*, the performance of text recitation; and third, through the rhythm—of conveying African thought through texts that are written in the English language.

Although South African multilingualism is also unmistakably reflected in contemporary South African anglophone spoken word poetry, it should not be ignored that Afrikaans, since it is still discriminated against as the language of the aparttheid regime, is in danger of being excluded from this general multicultural development. And this is despite the fact that numerous critics of apartheid had formulated their protests in Afrikaans. A direct connection between Afrikaans and apartheid is also questionable as Afrikaans is also the language of many so-called coloureds in South Africa. As it is not classified as a separate ethnic group, this segment of the population, unlike the Zulus, Xhosas or Ndebeles, does not appear in the official language atlas of South Africa. It is this very classification, however, that indirectly further perpetuates the policy of apartheid by connoting that these groups exist *parallel* to one another, rather than *with* one another. The image of eleven languages/peoples that exist on an equal footing is thus based on the model of a racial ideology that, firstly, is not appropriate for life in South Africa and, secondly, excludes a large social class to which none of these languages/peoples is attributed. For this reason, poetry performer Xoli Norman warns that dividing South Africa into eleven official languages, following the ethnic lines of the former apartheid regime, in a sense represents a legacy of apartheid. While there is no question that this racial policy was based on the physical characteristics of the people of South Africa, criticism of racial policy has neglected the language aspect up to now. Norman sees in this, however, an ethnicization that perpetually keeps the ethnic groups

in South Africa separated from one another on the basis of language, a situation that clashes with the idea of a shared culture.

> I recently finished a master's dissertation on the Representation of Coloured Identities on the Witwatersrand Reef. The central argument is that discursive preoccupations with colouredness in South Africa and elsewhere serves to protect imagined 'purer' racial identities. This preoccupation is at best concerned with the preservation of the status quo. The new South African slogan of the Rainbow Nation seems to function on this preamble, where the eclectic racial strata collapsed under the rubric of an imagined Rainbowism. While these interventions seem to be about race, they are also about language. (Norman 2007: 153)

It is particularly in the confluence of languages, as seen in spoken word poetry, that a mutual interpenetration takes place, which could serve not only as a mirror, but also as a model for the social development of South Africa.

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7

Cultural Identity and Rewriting the Past

Contemporary South African Literature(s)

Monika Reif-Huelser
University of Konstanz, Germany

South Africa is a country with many ethnic groups, many languages and many immigrants. Fearing hunger, military dictatorship and persecution, these immigrants flee from other African countries and come to South Africa. In popular understandings of Africa, says the South African sociologist Dunbar Moodie, "race and ethnicity (often called 'tribalism') tend to be sharply distinguished. On the one hand, race is held to have been a colonial import, brought from the metropolitan West to justify rule over 'inferior' or 'uncivilised' peoples" (Moodie 2005: 319). When most African states attained independence in the 1960s, colonial racist rule was largely abolished. "Tribalism", however, Moodie argues, is believed to be indigenous, peculiarly African, and "at the heart of ongoing, insolvable problems that continue to haunt African nation-states to this very day".

Some of these problems can be clearly seen in Rwanda, in Zimbabwe or very recently also in South Africa. When violence broke out in the province of Natal between 1987 and 1991, it was hardly considered a news item worthy of reporting by the international Press. It was perceived as "Zulus killing Zulus". When the epicentre of violence moved to Witwatersrand in 1990 and nearly 1,000 persons in the townships around Johannesburg were killed in a very short time, it was "Zulus killing Xhosa". As Moodie points out, the international Press reported this as "tribal warfare" although—as was quite obvious from inside the country—the reasons for the conflict and the killing were politically motivated. "... in both places the fighting was between the Inkatha and UDF (United Democratic Front)/COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) supporters"(ibid.). This was hardly mentioned in the media, because "tribalism trumps all other explanations".

In the following reflections I want to read and discuss three autobiographical texts—quite different in time, theme and style. They are Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion* (1916), Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1959) and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2001). Reading the texts subsequently offers insights into the changing status of the "native" in South African literature, as it moves from the *realisation of difference* in Plaatje's *Native Life* to the *realisation of the potential of difference* in Mphahlele, until it has to grapple with the *resistance of representation* in Wicomb, when the history of apartheid and the quest for truth in political procedures are at stake. The three narratives cover almost all of the twentieth century and lead the reader through the turbulent history of a nation whose cultural and political goal was to gather together all South African peoples under the umbrella of the "Rainbow Nation".

THE BEGINNINGS OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIGENOUS LITERATURE

Oliver Schreiner, the South African writer and political activist, wrote:

> ... there is a subtle but a very real bond, which unites all South Africans, and differentiates us from all other peoples in this world. This bond is our mixture of races itself. It is this which divides South Africans from all other peoples in the world, and makes us one. (Schreiner 1923: 61)

She formulated these sentences in her collection of essays *Thoughts on South Africa*, published posthumously in 1923, twenty-five years before the *official* institution of the apartheid system (i.e. its formalisation through a series of laws by the National Party commencing in 1948, when it came into power). Being of Boer background, Schreiner expresses her vision of South Africa as a country, which should be modelled after the cultural and political principle of *diversity within unity.* Having experienced the South African situation as utterly racist and segregationist during her lifetime (1855–1920), she dedicated her work to the struggle for freedom and equality for all South African peoples. Her novel *The Story of an African Farm*, published in 1883, is considered the first "South African" novel ever written. The literary critic Laura Chrisman argues that Schreiner's novel is a much more challenging example of anti-imperialist fiction than Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* published two years later. She even considers Sol Plaatje's almost forgotten novel *Mhudi* a direct response to Schreiner's feminist theory.[1]

The first native South African author, Sol Plaatje belonged to the Barolong tribe from the area of Mafeking. His book *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) can

[1] See Chrisman's (2000) challenging interpretation of South African literary tradition.

be seen as a sequel to and contestation not only of Schreiner's novel, but also of her political activity. Born in 1876 in the lands of the Tswana, Plaatje "was one of the key players in the great siege".[2] He acted as the magistrate's interpreter and as such he established a vital link between the British civil authorities and the African majority beleaguered within the town's military perimeter. Neil Parsons points out that Plaatje's diaries from this period, published long after his death, can be seen as a remarkable record both of the siege and of his early prose experimentation as a writer, "mixing languages and idioms, and full of bright humour" (Plaatje 1990: 3). As far as military history is concerned the lifting of the Siege of Mafeking was a significant victory for the British and a crushing defeat for the Boers.

After the war, Plaatje began work as a journalist and tried promoting the idea that the British would enfranchise all educated and propertied males in the defeated Boer colonies (Transvaal and Orange Free State) disregarding race. But to his great disappointment the British gave a whites-only franchise to the defeated Boers and thus paved the way for further suppression and segregation of the black peoples in the Cape Colony and Natal. As Parsons argues, this political disappointment and the conclusions Plaatje drew from it can be seen in an unpublished manuscript of 1908–9 entitled "Sekgoma—The Black Dreyfus". Plaatje, in this manuscript, attacks the British for not according civil rights to their African subjects outside the Cape Colony (1916: 3).

Plaatje began work on *Native Life in South Africa* in 1914, while on his way to Britain to plead with the Imperial Government against the Natives' Land Act of 1913, as part of a deputation of the South African Native National Congress. Schreiner did the same five years earlier when she, together with other champions of African political rights, protested against the decision of British Parliament to unify the British colonies of Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal and Orange River—an act which practically established the nation of South Africa. This was the work of white delegates to a national convention at Durban, Natal, in 1908, who represented white electorates, who comprised less than one-fifth of the population of South Africa.

Native Life in South Africa is said to be the first book by a black South African and deals with the effects of the Natives' Land Act which introduced a uniform system of land segregation between the races. This act—the most destructive of many more to follow—resulted in the immediate expulsion of blacks, called "squatters", from their ancestral lands in the Orange Free State now declared "white". Plaatje explains in his book that a "squatter in South Africa is a native who owns some livestock and, having no land of his own, hires a

2 Neil Parsons "Introduction" to Plaatje's *Native Life*, (2–4). The Siege of Mafeking took place from 14 October 1899 to 16 May 1900. Mafeking (now Mafikeng) lies on the railway north to Zimbabwe in the North West Province of South Africa near the Botswana border.

farm or grazing and ploughing rights from a landowner, to raise grain for his own use and feed his stock". The act threatened the very existence of the small farmers as it refused any possibility for them to keep up their habitat. They were forbidden to buy or rent land, except in a few small reserves consisting largely of wasteland. The Land Act was finally overturned in 1991.

As a writer, journalist and politician Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje had one predominant aim: He devoted his manifold talents to the struggle of African people against injustice and dispossession during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a period which saw South Africa transform from a colonial backwater into an industrial state.

Sol Plaatje belonged to a small group of mission-educated African intelligentsia, who in 1912 founded the South African Native National Congress—renamed in 1926 as the African National Congress (ANC). Plaatje, who is said to have known seven languages, used this knowledge for translating folk tales and songs into his native tribal language Setswana in order to keep it alive. He also translated several Shakespearean plays into Setswana. Of these, however, only *The Comedy of Errors* (*Diphosho-phosho)* and *Julius Caesar* (*Dintshontsho tsa bo-Juliuse Kesara*) have survived.

In order to re-create the sense of their history among South African peoples and to increase their shared knowledge about a common past despite the traumatic politics of dispossession before and under apartheid, artists, critics, academics and politicians have tried to make this knowledge accessible for a broader audience within and outside South Africa. Lost documents and writings were rediscovered and republished, such as Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* and his *Mafeking Diary: A Black Man's View of a White Man's War*.[3] Attempts were made not only to retrieve lost memories through narratives, but also to bring back "lost tribes" through stories of history. Zoë Wicomb's novel *David's Story,* which I will discuss later in this chapter, is one of the literary paradigms out of a veritable flood of literary and critical books and essays on "histories in literature". This proves how attractive it was to re-create historical knowledge through literary imagination. Submerged or buried knowledge was revived so that it could merge into already existing and well-functioning epistemic systems.

Anthropologist Monica Wilson and historian Leonard Thompson formulate a programmatic scope in this direction when they write in the opening sentences of the two-volume *Oxford History of South Africa*: "This work derives from our belief that the central theme of South African history is interaction between peoples of diverse origins, languages, technologies, ideologies, and social systems, meeting on South African soil" (Wilson and Thompson 1969: v).

[3] See Plaatje (1990). Tim Couzens produced the definitive edition of Plaatje's sole novel *Mhudi* (1996).

I would like to add that in times of transnational histories too, South African histories transgress the boundaries of the nation-state and turn into the "histories of inter-national relationships", as Jürgen Osterhammel argues in his book on historiography beyond the nation-state.[4] To describe the political situation in South Africa as primarily an antagonism between the black and white would mean to simplify a complex system struggling with many open ends to a "simplistic binary of black versus white" (Coombes 2003: 2).

Plaatje's book on *Native Life in South Africa Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion* is a paradigmatic text presenting a view on South African social, cultural and individual history "from within", so to speak. Reading this text provides a valuable basis for grounding and understanding the literary tradition as it has formed itself particularly after 1994.

African Humanism and Black Consciousness

There is no doubt that the South African writer and critic Es'kia Mphahlele wanted to follow the road Plaatje had laid out a generation earlier. Mphahlele intensified the knowledge about and the emotional involvement of the readers in black life in South Africa by introducing autobiographical writing and using poems and poetic language as narrative as well as an expression of his political stance on governmental issues. Having born in the slums in the outskirts of Pretoria in 1919, Mphahlele had witnessed abject poverty and racism from close quarters from his early childhood. Despite the circumstances he had a relatively good education, which furthered his love for reading and later on for critical thinking. He became a teacher and was jailed in 1952 for his staunch opposition to the Bantu Education Act, which established academic apartheid. He lost his job, worked as a journalist with *Drum* for a while, but then decided to leave the country.[5] This he did in 1957 and lived for twenty years in self-imposed exile before returning to South Africa in 1977. Until his retirement in 1987 he taught as a professor of literature at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

First, I want to focus briefly on his autobiography *Down Second Avenue*, which was unanimously praised by critics; and then on one of his poems in which his particular way of addressing the readers by fusing literary genres becomes clear.

Much of Mphahlele's early experience in South Africa went into his autobiography *Down Second Avenue* (1959), which he ends with his leaving

4 See Osterhammel (2003).

5 *Drum* was a popular magazine in South Africa during the 1950s. It sided with the black movement against apartheid, so that its journalists and publishers were drawn into the political turmoil.

South Africa for Nigeria to start a new life there with his family. At that time Mphahlele could not know that only a year later Nigeria would enter decades of turbulence due to one military putsch after another. Considering this autobiography it is not surprising that Mphahlele tried to focus on what he called "African Humanism" and "Black Consciousness". Wherever he committed himself, be it in church or politics, he soon found himself either betrayed or misled—so he tells us. At a time when he was short of personal funds and when a black youth who had sought his advice had been severely beaten by white policemen, an Anglican priest appeared on Mphahlele's doorstep to remind him of a sum he owed the church. He describes the alienation that he felt from the self-styled helpers of the oppressed:

> Just now, I don't think it's fair for anybody to tell me to expect a change of heart among a bunch of madmen who are determined not to cede an inch or listen to reason. It is unfair to ask me to subsist on mission school sermons about Christian conduct and passive resistance in circumstances where it is considered a crime to be decent; where a policeman will run me out of my house at the point of a sten gun when I try to withhold my labour. For years I have been told by white and Black preachers to love my neighbour; love him when there's a bunch of whites who reckon they are Israelites come out of Egypt in obedience to God's order to come and civilize heathens; a bunch of whites who feed on the symbolism of God's race venturing into the desert among the ungodly. For years now I have been thinking it was all right for me to feel spiritually strong after a church service. And now I feel it is not the kind of strength that answers the demands of suffering humanity around me It doesn't even seem to answer the longings in my own heart. (Mphahalele 2004: 168)

The insight he formulates in a later passage towards the end of his autobiography shows what he has in mind when he conceives of a "Black Consciousness" and of African Humanism. We read and admire the clear-sightedness of the author and his humour:

> I admire the white man's achievements, his mind that plans tall buildings, powerful machinery. I used to want to justify myself and my own kind to the white man. I later discovered that it wasn't worth it. It was to myself and to my kind I needed to justify myself. I think now the white man has no right to tell me how to order my life as a social being, or order it for me. He may teach me how to make a shirt or to read and to write, but my forebears and I could teach him a thing or two if only he would listen and allow himself time to feel. Africa is no more for the white man who comes here to teach and to control her human and material forces and not to learn. (Mphahlele 2004: 208)

A very similar idea about the processes of cultural contact under colonial rule is described in Jürgen Osterhammel's book on colonialism. In a very convincing way he presents the particular power differential, which is at work in the colonial process. Colonialism, he writes, is a power relation between groups

and collectives, in which the fundamental decisions about the lifestyle of the colonized are made by a minority which is culturally different, hardly ready to adapt and mainly influenced by external interests. Connected with this are doctrines of vindication that emerge from the colonialists' conviction of their cultural superiority (Osterhammel 2007: 21).

In one of his early poems Mphahlele raises this idea of this specific colonial power differential, wrapping it in poetic language which is drenched with wrath. The title of the poem *Fathers and Sons* evokes the generational filiations connected with the question whether history can be changed.

> Fifteen years ago
> they dragged me out at dawn
> blindfolded me and shot me,
> then—
> eternity wrapped me up
> in my dazzling blackness.
>
> Now you see
> I have returned with others—
> not like Lazarus
> jolted from his grave,
> maybe even grousing
> that they yanked him out of sleep
> that he so badly needed. (Mphahlele 1981: 309)

Reading these lines many images come to mind—images which we know from documentaries, photographs, recent South African films dealing with the terror of the apartheid system. Here Mphahlele gives memory space to return. He provides space for the reader's active imagination to refill the void caused by repression. The "forgetting" which set in when "eternity wrapped me up in my dazzling blackness" expresses the traumatised mind which refuses to actively remember what is happening. There is no language to express the horror of torture. Therefore, consciousness gives in and draws an impenetrable veil around itself. In this stanza the speaker is the individual, alienated from his social bonds and thrown back completely on himself.

Fifteen years later the "I", isolated through individual suffering and death, has merged with "others". A whole generation of sons has come back to haunt the memories of the survivors and the perpetrators.

The following stanzas present the awakened "Black Consciousness" as a weapon, sharpened through shared memories. "I come with fury raising cyclones with my feet". The individual suffering has turned into political resistance which is then transformed into an effective catalyst for change and action only through the group.

In the next passage the mind struggling with remembrance, bringing back the past, is signified through the lines between semantic entities:

[...]
all I know
is that I'm 15 years of age
is that I feel the prison's cold and vermin
[...]
is that I'm scared
because last night they buried many bodies
in a big-big hole.
Tell my Mamma that I'm scared
[...]
Tell her that they asked me who's my father
And I said to them he's dead
and one of them had bluestone eyes
[...]
and now my heart is telling me—
that man with bluestone eyes
has *got* to have been there at dawn. (Mphahlele 1981: 310)

The last line of the poem comes round full circle to the beginning and from there the narrative voice can individualize not the victim but the torturer: "that man with bluestone eyes has *got* to have been there at dawn". The traumatic experience, repressed, encapsulated, eluding linguistic representation, can now be turned into words, songs, poems.

Memory, Truth and Writing

Re-writing the past in poems or novels creates an imaginary continuity between the past and the present from which the literary voice speaks. Hence it bridges a gap which in certain instances might have been caused by violent interruption. Plaatje's and Mphahlele's literary approaches to recreating history prove this point. With the violent history of Nazi-Germany in mind, Walter Benjamin argues that articulating the past "historically" does not mean to claim to know history "as it *really* was", to know "what *really* happened". Much rather, he says, "to know history" means "to seize a memory as it flashes through thought in the moment of danger" (Benjamin 1955: 253; my translation). What Benjamin calls a flash through the mind, corresponds to the idea of Édouard Glissant, who suggests that history "has its dimension of the un-explorable, at the edge of which we wander, our eyes wide open" (Glissant 1992: 66). Not only are the two categories of knowledge and understanding interlinked in these reflections, but the central role of imagination in the process of knowledge and understanding is underlined. In other words and more pointedly: "history" is

not to be understood as a phenomenon that can be "defined" or referentialized to the Real or Reality; much rather the process of "knowing" history unfolds itself through interpretation in the same sense as a "text" unfolds its meaning through reading. What then is the "truth" of or in fiction? And what then is the "truth" in memory?

In South Africa these questions were raised again with considerable poignancy in so-called "post-apartheid" literature dealing with the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). During the four years of the TRC's attempts to speak justice to victims as well as to perpetrators, if they "truly" repented, the motto was "Truth—The Road to Reconciliation". Doubts about truth in memory processes or the fact of distorted memories caused by traumatization made themselves heard very dimly, but they grew louder after the commission had presented its final report in 1998. The question of the relationship between fiction and truth had other underlying concerns: how to represent with aesthetic means something ungraspable; how to "seize a memory as it flashes through thought in the moment of danger", as Benjamin had put it?

One of the most thought-provoking literary texts dealing with this situation seems to me to be Zoë Wicomb's novel *David's Story*.[6] The novel is set in the last phase of apartheid; the protagonist David Dirkse, a coloured ANC freedom fighter, finds himself uprooted after Mandela's release, not sure how to integrate his past experiences as a political activist into what lies before him. All parameters for friend and foe, right and wrong, justice and crime, seem to have faded. In order to locate himself he embarks on a search for his ancestors' history and goes on a trip to Kokstad to find out more about the history of the Griqua tribe.[7] As part of his attempt to find a place and a voice for himself, David wants his life-story to be written; he cannot write it himself, however, because "he both wanted and did not want it to be written", comments the "writer/narrator" of David's autobiography, whom he had hired to write his story, so that it "would no longer belong to him [...] His fragments betray the desire to distance himself from his own story; the many beginnings, invariably flights into history, although he is no historian, show uncertainty about whether to begin at all" (Wicomb 2001: 1).

"David's story started at the Cape with Eva/Krotoa, the first Khoi woman in the Dutch castle," the narrator explains, but then admits that she left this part of the story out. David eventually agreed to that, but was adamant about

6 Wicomb (2001). References are to this edition.

7 The Griqua tribe is considered to be one of the oldest tribes in South Africa, whose members show indications that the majority of the present Griqua population is a racial mix of European genes dating back to the times of van Riebeeck mixed with Khoikhoi and, later, African (mainly Tswana) peoples, with only small contributions of the Bushman tribe.

including a piece on Saartje Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus" placed on display in Europe.

In a kind of critical, ironic commentary on the fashionable themes of rediscovery, on the contemporary postcolonial archaeological endeavour of "digging up the past", the author Zoë Wicomb has her protagonist David say: "One cannot write nowadays ... without a little monograph on Baartman; it would be like excluding history itself" (2001: 1).

A few pages into the novel the theme of beginning is addressed and doubly connoted "Beginning" refers to the beginning of the narrative that has to happen under the premises David lays out. But "beginning" also refers to the birth of a little baby, Saartje, who would later become Sara Bartman, representative of the Khoikhoi tribe or the San people who are considered the oldest indigenous tribe in South Africa.

In her book on history after apartheid, Annie Coombes writes in her book that since the first democratic elections, the use of "indigenous" as a marker of self-identification has become increasingly complex (2003: 208). The character of Dulcie in Wicomb's novel *David's Story* is a clear example of how complicated the term "indigenous" is with respect to the black population in South Africa and how effectively it was instrumentalized in the media as well as in political and cultural life. Actually one of the clearest cases in this respect, according to Annie Combes, was and still is the correct appellation for San or Khoikhoi peoples of southern Africa. In critical essays, which refer to the inhuman treatment of indigenous peoples by colonizers or magistrates of imperial powers, there is much terminological confusion—intentionally or not—with "bushmen" being a misnomer for the San and "Hottentot" for the Khoikhoi.

> Research has demonstrated that these terms are ridiculously reductive and inadequate to the task of describing the complex kinship patterns for diversified and heterogeneous communities with different political and geographical affiliations but whose peoples and economies have necessarily become intermingled over time. (Coombes 2003: 208–9)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to mark "a beginning" under these circumstances. How far back would one go in order to state the beginning of a people, particularly if its members have mixed and cross-mixed with other races and peoples? Annie Coombes suggests that the term "Khoisan" be used as a means of signalling the now hybrid "identity" of peoples in southern Africa whose existence may in the past have been primarily pastoralist or hunter-gatherer (Coombes 2003: 209).

In *David's Story*, "beginnings are too redolent of origins, of the sweaty and negligible act of physical union which will not be tolerated on these pages",

the narrator/writer tells us. Saartje arrived like any other baby, "unwilling" and "propelled damp and screaming into this world" (ibid.).

Later, when Sara became a member of the ANC, she met David; and hence the two storylines are interwoven. Sara is not the object of curiosity for the viewers' eyes as we know the historical Sara (Saartje) Baartman was. Sara's identity in David's story is not defined through bodily characteristics, but through the intensity of the relationship she and David have to each other.

> Steatopygous Sally, turning to the tune of the collapsed springs of the mattress, presses a buttock into David's thin hip, and offering warmth and well-being that brings a sleep-smile to his lips, does not as yet know of the epithet or its meaning. Neither does she know of the queens of steatopygia, the Griqua Lady Kok and Saartje Baartman, the Hottentot Venus displayed in Europe whose private scientist, Georges Cuvier, gave to the world those spectacular parts.
> ... David would like his wife to be something of a character; steatopygia, being a given, is not enough. (Coombes 2003: 17)

This passage criticises the way communities and societies tend to stigmatize those individuals whom they want to exclude because they do not fulfil the norm of "the normal". Wicomb's ethical criticism points in two directions in this narrative. On the one hand, she refers to what is known as the tragic story of the young Khoikhoi woman, Sara Bartman, who suffered such stigmatization of being shown around in European fairs and put on display together with wild animals. On the other hand, however, Wicomb points to the ambivalence in representing the case of Sara Bartman in postcolonial discourse. Writing about her, describing her body, telling her sad story to the end—does this not mean to put her on display? But what would be the consequence? Not to mention her at all and hand her story over to cultural amnesia?

Wicomb raises the question but does not provide an answer. Dulcie forms the centre of David's story, but she never appears, never expresses herself, never becomes accessible as a character either for the other characters or for the readers. David does not see "the need to flesh her out with detail" (Wicomb 2001: 134). "I think of her more as a kind of ... a kind of a scream somehow echoing through my story," he says. The narrator suggests that "writing things down ... would clarify what it is you want to say, bring to the surface things that you have not thought important, or simply have not remembered." And David reacts accordingly, "You mean [he says] make up a story, and invent things." Torn between the existential need for truth on the one hand, and the doubt not to remember truthfully on the other, makes David sceptical of the truth of memory in general. "Instead of being concerned about madness of his vision, David is troubled by the idea of false memory" (ibid.: 194).

After much struggle with David about a truthful rendering of his life story and his view on South African politics, the narrator starts to have doubts about the accessibility of truth, too. The female narrator not only writes David's

story, but also incorporates in the text the dialogue between the author and his subject. However, it is not always clear which of them is the author and which the subject. In other words, reflections on the story itself, on writing in general, on authorizing a subject, on the relation between truth and fiction accompany the creation of *David's Story*. At one point the narrator, desperate to understand what David tells her, also desperate to translate the narrative into appropriate words, ponders: "Perhaps the whole of it should be translated into the passive voice. Or better still, the middle voice" (197). Or she comments on the whole project and says: "It's impossible, this writing of a story through someone else. The whole thing is impossible." She sees no satisfying way to judge what David hides because he feels ashamed or what his traumatized consciousness suppresses. "I no longer know which story I am trying to write. Who could keep going in a straight line with so many stories, like feral siblings, separated and each running wild, chasing each other's tales?" (ibid.: 201)

Then there are passages in the narrator's and David's dialogue which refer to another level of meaning. J. M. Coetzee, for instance, praises the novel as a paradigmatic narrative of what the literature of a post-apartheid South Africa will look like. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out that Wicomb's story displays the "paradox of witnessing"—a comment which aims directly at the readily assumed, seemingly unquestioned truths of the TRC. The crucial question raised earlier in this essay as to "What is the nature of the relationship between truth and narrative?" is tackled here. The elusiveness of Dulcie points to the problems of representation when the cases in point are unspeakable truths or experiences, which resist any form of representation. Wicomb's "Dulcie", "as a kind of scream somehow echoing through [David's] story" *is* the representation of unrepresentability as such.

While David could still see the main goal of freeing South Africa, he was somehow able to integrate his actions into his life's story, actions which sometimes had to go against his own morals. All of a sudden, he realises that he still has to integrate all of these bad experiences into his own explanatory framework, a feat that seems much more difficult, now that the old justification of fighting against injustice is gone. Dismantling the old systems and behavioural patterns presented itself to be a multifaceted task that reached into all corners of public and private life. In a discussion with his wife Sally, David remarks: "But [...], you're wrong about just being ourselves, about being simply what we are. We don't know what we are; the point is that in a place where everything gets distorted, no one knows who he is" (ibid.: 29). After the unbanning of the movement, he finds himself at a loose end: "But nowadays there is also more time to think, and turning an eye inward he finds a gash, a festering wound that surprises him" (ibid.: 12). He is confused about where he is headed now and feels as if the bigger picture, including his ancestral heritage, is able to give

him the orientation he needs, in order to understand where he came from and where is it that he is going now.

Forming personal and cultural identity is closely related to memory: What we remember, what other people remember about us and how we integrate these memories into the process of learning, experiencing, repudiating. Cultural memory is related through narratives, passed on from generation to generation. "And what do we know of our ancestors?" one of the characters asks, and continues, "[o]nly that which is passed down by word of mouth, for there was no one to record those momentous times" (ibid.: 87). Once more the relation between narrative and truth is evoked here. Writing gives form to memory and provides a linguistic frame for references and meaning, whereas oral narratives are characterized by a certain freedom of expression, association and transformation.

Despite all the intentional as well as the unintentional gaps in David's narrative, it is the writer's task to "invent a structure, [...] in which your voodoo shadow can thrash around without rhyme or reason, but at least with boundaries, so that we don't lose you altogether" (ibid.: 199). *David's Story* plays with these issues throughout the book, sometimes in an affirmative way, sometimes based on deep doubt as to whether a "story" can be created at all. "Why, then, does David want his story written—which is to say, have it read?" Writing something down means distancing the written from the writer. The "text" turns into an object of its own, independent of its creator, but dependent on language as its creative medium. In its final form the potential for change lies in interpretation and exegesis. These are the reasons why David feels ambivalent about his project of having his life-story written down:

> Yes, he does feel ambivalent about this project, which invites a reader to perform a task he does not value. [...] It is not that he wants to be remembered; rather, it is about putting things down on paper so that you can see what there is, shuffle pages around, if necessary, until they make sense. (Ibid.: 140)

This hesitation to turn away from what has already been written, to leave it there for other readers to struggle with, to bring other memories, other experiences, other world views to the text and thereby change its meaning, has to do with the central questions of Wicomb's novel: how to come to grips with the past and how to incorporate its lesson into the ongoing never-ending process of everyday life directed towards the future. What David struggles with is the desire to be freed from the responsibility of past events. At the same time, however, as an eye-witness he feels the pressure to speak up—for himself and for others who cannot speak for themselves. David finds himself in an ethical double bind: on the one hand he wants to emancipate himself from his encaging memories, just as Nietzsche warned his contemporaries against allowing the future to be buried under the debris of the past. On the other

hand, however, the present and the future have to be built on interpretations and evaluations of the past, otherwise there would be no sense of continuity and belonging. In *The Remembered Self* Sarah Nuttall elaborates on this:

> To see that one has not located the truth about the past, but only an ongoing narrative of self—to see the subjectivity of the versions of the past one has offered to oneself, binaries, perhaps, which have been able to hold the weight of one's sorrow, to guard against a void of meaning and understanding which one most fears—can be newly painful [...]. (2000: 85)

André Brink follows the same path when he argues that in the process of textualizing the event it is also narrativized, which means that the representations of history repeat, in large detail, the processes of fiction.[8]

Wicomb uses the fragmentary narrative structure and the unclear separation between writer, reader, narrator and author to underline the assumption made by both, David and the female narrator in the text, that truth is an ambiguous term. There is never just one truth, never only one way of remembering things, but every memory includes a certain omission. "Thus David ought to have seen how truth, far from being ready-made, takes time to be born, slowly takes shape in the very act of repetition, of telling again and again" (2001: 103). In view of the structure of *David's Story* this is a programmatic sentence and a self-referential reflection, as the text itself circumvents the empty centre of the term "truth".

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

By focusing so strongly on the relation between truth and narrative, the novel functions as a commentary on "sense" and "Non-sense" of the project of the TRC. Euphorically greeted in the beginning as an alternative way to deal with crime and punishment or with guilt and redemption, the view presented by writers and intellectuals becomes more and more sceptical. Zoë Wicomb points to the core of the problem when she negotiates the question how much claim for truth narratives can raise. Under this premise her novel works on two levels, equally important in the social and the political debate of a country: (1) How important is the search for truth anyway? (2) How is this concept linked with the possibility of justice?

In my opinion it is one of the strong points of Wicomb's novel that she raises the question of justice and how it is linked with memory, narration, fiction and representation. Or to put it differently: Is the relationship between positive

[8] See André Brink quoted by Michiel Heyns who, with reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, explores the relationship between truth and narrative, "The Whole Country's Truth: Confession and Narrative in Recent South African Writing" in Atwell and Harlow (2000).

law and justice to be ranged on the same level as truth and justice? Antjie Krog in her documentary memoir *Country of My Skull* (1999) also turns to these conflicting terms. With respect to the TRC hearings, she suggests that "[i]t will sometimes be necessary to choose between the truth and justice. We should choose truth; and although truth does not bring back the dead, it releases them from silence" (Krog 1999: 35). Is that true for the character of Dulcie in Wicomb's novel—the character who is described by David as "a kind of scream somehow echoing through [his] story" (2001: 134)?

In his discussion of the ethics of literature, the philosopher Peter Johnson speaks about the "gift" a novel can have in stock for us. It invites our collaboration, he writes, and asks that we re-enact its narrative course, that we enter its fictional world. From this achieved perspective, we embrace a series of images of moral possibilities that show directly, or sometimes cautiously remind us, how life's defeats and dilemmas can be faced: "The novelists' art does not represent life, intended to take authority away from the multiple, the concrete and the real. What they offer is a source of transfiguration, of so enhancing life that its unyielding nature can be recognised and confronted" (Johnson 2004: 55).

In the last chapter of Wicomb's novel the narrator turns away from the story, its content and its problems. "The words escape me", she states and asks: "Will I never know what's going on? Does no one care what I think"? (2001: 213) Finally, she does not want to take over the authority of authorship: "I will have nothing more to do with it. I wash my hands of this story".

That is one way to deal with an "impossible story" (2001: 212), with an unrepresentable past. Antjie Krog takes a different stand: "It is not about skin colour, culture, language, but about people. The personal pain puts an end to all stereotypes" she says. And: "We connect with our humanity" (Krog 1999: 68). These very personal depictions of truth come close to what Johnson called "the novel's gift"; they serve as a mirror to the nation's attempt to grasp the whole weight of the past and the present. As the stories continue to deal with the manifold aspects of truth, memory and trauma, they continue to provide a man-made space for them. They enable the readers to walk the thin line between performance and reality and have fiction reveal truth that reality obscures.

I want to end with a quote from Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee's book on negotiating the past:

> It also remains as a challenge to all who are, in some way, involved in memorializing the past, to keep multiple versions of the past alive and not to privilege, as has so often been done, a few master narratives that offer a sense of unity at the cost of ignoring the fracture and dissonance. (Nuttall and Coetzee 1998: 14)

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8

Gender Violence in Postcolonial* Aboriginal Communities
Indigenous and White Perceptions

Sue Ryan-Fazilleau
University of La Rochelle, France

Domestic violence in Aboriginal communities is a topic of debate in Australia at the moment. Reports such as *Breaking the Silence: Creating the Future*, published by the Attorney General's Department of New South Wales in 2006 have documented the gravity of the problem. The Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, composed of three Aboriginal women, two Aboriginal men and one non-indigenous man, declared that, although "any statistical data is likely to underestimate the extent of the issue", the problem is widespread and there are a few Aboriginal communities that have not been affected (2006: 2). In 2007, Louis Nowra published a dramatic and controversial work called *Bad Dreaming: Aboriginal Men's Violence against Women and Children*, in response to a stay in Alice Springs hospital in 2005, during which he saw battered women and spoke to an Aboriginal man who boasted about brutally raping a thirteen-year-old girl (2007a: 1). He set out to alert the general public for, according to him, despite the reports, the articles and the essays, they remain ignorant because state governments have declined to take any action. The issue was, however, forcibly brought to public attention by John Howard's "shock and awe plan of attack" (Nowra 2007b) when he sent the army into Aboriginal communities in June 2007. Nowra acknowledges that the plan was paternalistic and, even though it was white paternalism that led to dysfunction in Aboriginal society, he hails the ex-Prime Minister's action on the grounds that now the entire nation knew about the issue of domestic abuse prevalent in Aboriginal communities.

* I am aware that this is a contentious concept in the Australian context. My working hypothesis is that colonization came to an end for aborigines in 1967 when the referendum recognized their Australian citizenship.

Bad Dreaming begins by asking if male-on-female violence was a part of traditional Aboriginal culture. After quoting several biased sources, he concludes that it was, but I shall not go back over the shoddy scholarship as that ground has already been covered by Behrendt and Watson in their response to Nowra. Instead I would like to question the relevance of this point to the issue today. During colonization, indigenous culture was maimed and ossified, forcibly prevented from evolving.

In his 1957 classic, *Portrait du colonisé*, Tunisian anti-colonial and postcolonial critic Albert Memmi points out that, since the colonized are traumatized by colonial denigration of their culture, their first act of rebellion is to reclaim their self-esteem by reconstructing their community identity. In an initial knee-jerk reaction to colonial discrimination, they will erect a positive counter-myth to cancel out the negative mythology that the colonizer imposed on them. During this phase, the newly-decolonized subject does indeed revere his ancient traditions without discrimination, including elements that may be anachronistic or even contrary to human rights. He suffered for so long under oppression that one cannot expect his automatic resurrection as an outward-looking humanist or an internationalist. He must first recover from the trauma (Memmi 1957: 29–30). But in the 2004 sequel to his seminal work, *Portrait du décolonisé arabo-musulman*, Memmi (58) goes on to describe how the culture of the decolonized community evolves. He defines culture as a motley collection of odds and ends where tired old recipes and brilliant new ideas co-exist. Its function, he states, is to offer a group of people solutions to the problems of everyday life. Thus, when the situation evolves, so must the solutions. "Living culture" constantly tests traditional elements to see if they still correspond to today's problems and constantly adapts them so that they will. "Living culture" is by nature iconoclastic and heretical; it has no qualms about dropping outmoded traditions. Nowra's preoccupation with the question of male-on-female violence in traditional Aboriginal culture implicitly suggests that contemporary Aboriginal culture is not a living culture in this sense, but an ossified remnant of pre-colonial times, incapable of change.

The "Breaking the Silence" report specifies that perpetrators of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities "were most often described as men who were grandfathers, fathers, step-fathers" and were also often "reported as being important people within the community" (2006: 3). Nowra goes further than this, claiming that these elders consciously exploit the most backward elements of traditional culture—notably men's supposedly customary right to abuse their women—to escape punishment for their crimes. National responses to the issue of Aboriginal domestic violence are complicated by an uneasy awareness of a recent history of two centuries of colonization. Guilt on the one hand and resentment on the other, cloud the ability to reason and provoke emotional responses and a desire to allocate blame. In Nowra's view,

modern-day Indigenous tyrants play on the guilt of white Australians who are now afraid to criticize any aspect of Aboriginal society that is claimed to emanate from the traditional culture their ancestors sought to eradicate. Memmi denounces this attitude, which he considers cowardly, positing that, if you respect a people, you will tell them the truth, not pussy-foot around it because you are feeling guilty. He also declares that human rights take precedence over cultural rights and that colonial guilt should not be allowed to muzzle critical analysis. Nevertheless, one cannot simply ignore the vexed ethical question of who has the right to speak. Isn't criticism of the Aboriginal community more acceptable when it comes from an insider than from an outsider? And who has the right to make decisions about belonging and exclusion?

In his 1957 work, Memmi, an insider, idealistically looked forward to an end to colonial violence. In his 2004 sequel, he bitterly notes that his idealism was misplaced, that French colonial violence has given way to postcolonial Arab violence perpetrated by the new national leaders, those who should have their people's interests at heart. Nowra's representation of contemporary Aboriginal society in Australia slots itself into this paradigm. However, another way of looking at Aboriginal domestic violence would be in terms of a "pecking order" where damaged Aboriginal men take out their frustration and despair on weaker members of their damaged community.

Having touched upon the works of various scholars—white, Aboriginal and Franco-Arab—I will now move on to an analysis of two insider representations of male-on-female violence in postcolonial, Aboriginal communities. Each individual develops a multitude of belongings and, therefore, a multitude of identities, each of which emerges in response to different contexts (Halpern et al. 2004: 2). While, in situations of conflict, an individual needs to identify herself as part of a group, when she feels safe within a group she tends to affirm her own uniqueness (ibid.: 1). When they are victims of domestic violence, Aboriginal women are torn between two conflicting loyalties; if they defend women's human rights by denouncing their abusers, they may feel they are weakening the larger Aboriginal community, which is also in crisis and equally in need of group solidarity.

I am going to take a closer look at this issue through a literary lens by examining how two Aboriginal women novelists, in an effort to reconcile the conflicting interests of their two embattled identities, seek to strike a balance between denouncing Aboriginal male-on-female violence on the one hand, and maintaining solidarity with their disadvantaged Aboriginal communities on the other. The novels I have chosen are Doris Pilkington/Nugi Garimara's *Under the Wintamarra Tree* (2002) and Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise* (1997).

Pilkington's autobiographical *Under the Wintamarra Tree* begins with a representation and explanation of the traditional mardu society. Her description contains matter-of-fact non-judgemental accounts of polygamy (2002: 4). She

goes on to an account of traditional "Law Business" that offered an Aboriginal man a matrimonial choice between her mother, Molly, and another woman. Since he chose the other woman, Molly was "passed on to [...] his brother" (ibid.: 22), like a commodity. When Doris's young aunts broke a customary law, they were first beaten by a male relative and then threatened with marriage to already married older men in the role of their second wives (ibid.: 49). The narrator writes, with apparent approval, of the girls having learnt a timely lesson from this (ibid.: 50). The narrative contains no anachronistic judgmental discourse about the sexist nature of these traditions and makes no link between them and her contemporary problems with her Nyoongah husband, Gerard Pilkington. In the final quarter of the novel, Pilkington depicts her relationship with him. She underlines the destructive role her mother-in-law played in their marital relations. She despised Doris, who came under the Native Act, unlike the Pilkingtons, who were "octoroons" (ibid.: 163). This segregation was a result of the white policy of divide-and-rule that classified aborigines according to their proportion of white blood.. This woman's disdain affected Gerard's attitude to his wife. We learn that Pilkington was a victim of domestic abuse during her years with him, but she refers to the violence in an oblique or euphemistic way, writing of her husband's "negativity" towards her (ibid.: 174). She frequently uses the passive voice to avoid naming her abuser—"the constant criticism, the sarcasm and the intimidation continued" (ibid.: 166). She sometimes defends him, claiming he "wasn't a bad person, despite the humiliation and intimidation he inflicted on her in the presence of others" (ibid.: 169). Pilkington does not break with Aboriginal community solidarity, but the criticism is there even if it is expressed with "*pudeur*", to borrow a French term, which combines notions of discretion, modesty and restraint.

Only when Doris gets a job working with the local Aboriginal community and begins to regain the self-esteem that was taken from her as a stolen toddler, is she able to ignore Gerard's "negative attitude and hurtful comments" (ibid.: 195). We eventually learn that she is being "subjected to physical as well as emotional and verbal abuse" (ibid.: 197) and that her husband is an alcoholic. However, she continues to describe his violence in muted terms: "It took one inexcusable night of excessive drinking and a violent attack to force Doris to make a decision about whether to remain a victim to her husband's instability" (ibid.: 198). She finally leaves him. In *Under the Wintamarra Tree*, an example of "living" Aboriginal culture, Pilkington has effectively broken the silence surrounding male-on-female violence in an Aboriginal community even if she has chosen not to dwell on the gruesome details. Her narrative restraint, which leaves her loyalty to the wider Aboriginal cause intact, may not be conducive to a spectacular denunciation of the problem of domestic violence within the community that forces the Australian public to take stock of the situation, but perhaps this was simply not her aim. Keeping in mind that the work is

an autobiography, would it be seemly for her to strip herself naked for the world to see? Her low-key, restrained presentation of the problem enables her both to make her point and to emphasize the positive points of her life-story, thus offering herself as a role-model for those who need it most—other abused Aboriginal women. As she points out in the epilogue (ibid: 206), she is concerned with helping the victims, not with "finger-pointing and blame-shifting", to borrow Behrendt and Watson's phrase.

In *Plains of Promise*, Alexis Wright shows less restraint, but then her work is not an autobiography. Her representation of violence within Aboriginal communities is as specific and hard-hitting as accounts to be found in the 2006 "Breaking the Silence" report, but without the voyeuristic edge that mars some of Nowra's *Bad Dreaming*. Wright declines to engage in the debate around whether or not violence in Aboriginal society can be imputed to traditional culture. She situates her narrative between the 1950s and the late 1980s, thus spanning both the assimilation and self-determination eras. All the Aboriginal communities she represents, even in the 1950s, have already been disrupted by contact with whites, including the one still living on its traditional lands. She underlines the lack of pan-Aboriginal solidarity between the different communities, describing the rivalry between the St. Dominic's mission group and the bush group still living on their land around the "disappearing lake". The "traditional" group consider the mission community to be "'rubbish people [... who] don't keep the law properly'" (1997: 46) for "[t]here was competition about purity of culture and they saw themselves as he leaders in this respect" (ibid.: 47). As Memmi points out, the concept of "pure" culture is a weapon in community power struggles.

But even the "uppity" (1997: 95) "traditional" group has been affected by white colonization, for Ivy's mother was stolen from them as a child and forced to become a companion-cum-nanny to a white settler's children (1997: 12). When she is seduced by a white station-worker and then falls pregnant with Ivy, she is returned to "the native compound", but the other aborigines exclude her, blaming *her* for the colonial violence visited upon her (1997: 45, 110). She eventually throws hot fat over a man who "was just trying to be *nice* to [her] child (1997: 12) (italics mine) and so the authorities have her removed to St. Dominic's mission—"a place where bad Aborigines were sent" (1997: 12), where the whites steal her child from her and the other blacks exclude her because she is a "myall" (1997: 33) "from the rubbish country" (ibid.). In despair, she commits suicide by setting fire to herself.

Thereafter Ivy becomes the main focus of violence in the novel—both white and black. Wright's representation of the colonial violence visited on her is unequivocal. After the mission authorities have kidnapped seven-year-old Ivy from her mother and the latter died, Jipp, Protector of aborigines, begins to rape her regularly. The narrator explains that she was his "first little

girl" (197: 30) and that he chose her because his previous female victims had talked, leading the Aboriginal elders to treat him in an over-familiar way. "Jipp chose Ivy because she had no family" (ibid.: 31). The abuse continues until she falls pregnant at the age of 14, when Jipp marries her off to an aborigine who does not want her. Next she is shipped off to a mental institution run by the same church group that controls St. Dominic's. The abuse she suffers there is reminiscent of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the 1962 novel by Ken Kesey. She becomes the object of pseudo-scientific study and experiment and falls prey to the Chief Administrator who uses her as a pawn in his power games. Ivy ends up catatonic (ibid.: 167). The asylum is dismantled when the administrator is finally nailed for corruption, mismanagement, abuse of power and embezzlement of funds destined for the care of his star Aboriginal patient, Ivy. She is subsequently farmed out to the care of an elderly Aboriginal lady of questionable sanity.

Wright presents the colonial violence meted out to Ivy in an almost matter-of-fact way. Jipp's hypocrisy and abuse of his power are a matter of course. But Ivy does not only fall prey to white violence, she is also a constant victim to sometimes spectacular violence from within the Aboriginal community at St. Dominic's. From when she is just a little girl, the other incarcerated girls taunt her about her "relationship" with Jipp. She is victimized, tormented and excluded for they blame her for the sexual abuse inflicted on her by the missionary. For instance they shave off her head as a badge of loose morals (1997: 59). There is also the question of a spate of suicides by burning following the death of Ivy's mother. The other aborigines blame Ivy for this too and they "attacked her whenever their tempers flared up. Ivy was often left semi-conscious after these attacks. A rib. A bone. A finger. Broken to mend by itself. No one bothered, not even the missionaries, to acquaint themselves with the child's injuries. Who really cared?" (1997: 22–23). The missionaries claimed to detect a "sly" and promiscuous" (1997: 23) look on her face. The aborigines a sly and "uppity" look. The narrator reveals that she was in fact cultivating a look as though she were about to burst into tears, simply because she craved sympathy (1997: 23). Alone, uprooted, prey to violence from both sides of the colonial divide, she becomes a textbook illustration of the effects of long-term abuse—she has low self-esteem (1997: 24, 32), is unable to construct interpersonal relationships, becomes introverted, sullen, rebellious (1997: 49) and her ability to learn at school is impaired (1997: 51–52).

When Ivy discovers that the Aboriginal community blames her for the spate of deaths following her mother's, she is "[d]azed and shocked [...] She cannot believe she is thought of as the embodiment of evil. Why should they think this? She has no power" (1997: 56). And yet the community takes her imagined responsibility very seriously. The elders instigate a traditional enquiry (ibid.: 39), sending Elliot "to travel the songlines to the dangerous country. Ivy's

mother's country" (ibid.: 43), all the way to her "[s]ickness country" (ibid.: 56), as they call it, "to find out the reason for the big mob of sorry business affecting them all" (ibid.: 43). When Elliot gets to Ivy's country, he encounters the rival Aboriginal group whose representatives also speak of widespread sickness in their community. He learns that, as Ivy is related to a deceased Kadaitcha man, her mother's people want her back home because they think she might be able to cure the "sickness" which makes their people seem to long for death—"'Some don't even wait to get sick, they find some other way to kill themselves'" (ibid.: 93). In essence, the mission community sees Ivy as the cause, while the more traditional community sees her as the cure for what appears to be the same "disease". Here, through the mouthpiece of the enlightened old Chinaman Pilot Ah King, an ex-doctor who fled his own country and has settled with and married into the bush group of "Aboriginal people whose culture of traditional ownership he had no difficulty in understanding" (1997: 138), Wright appears to introduce into her narrative some implicit criticism of superstition in traditional Aboriginal culture. When quizzed by Elliot about the origin of "the sickness", Pilot warns him not to believe all the nonsense he will hear—"'You people all believe too many stories'", "'[n]o one allowed simply to get sick'" (1997: 46).

Perhaps the most shocking instalment of the narrative of life-long violence done to Ivy concerns the period of her marriage to Elliot, when she is fourteen. Wright's description is as gruesome as descriptions of domestic violence to be found in Nowra's account of life for women in contemporary Aboriginal communities. Ivy's abuse at Elliot's hands begins with a brutal wedding-night rape. Then he hands her over to his father while he goes back to his various lovers. Ivy's father-in-law torments her with false accusations of sexual infidelity, beats her and even sexually assaults her (1997: 150). When Elliot comes back home, he too accuses her of adultery and beats her for it. A similar situation is described in *Bad Dreaming*:

> . . . these men assault their women for the most minor of reasons, whether it is not cooking for them, for drinking with another man, or for simply being 'cheeky'. Sometimes the reasons for the violent assaults are almost unbelievable. Jordon relates that in Maningrida it was common, whether they were drunk or not, for men to bash their wives when the women returned from a holiday or trip *just in case* they had done anything wrong while they were away. (Nowra 2007a: 42)

Nowra's account differs from Wright's in its explicit inclusion of narratorial judgement (e.g. "[s]ometimes the reasons for the violent assaults are almost unbelievable" and the use of italics in the quote above). He is a-tremble with outrage that he wishes to impart to his reader, unlike Wright who leaves her reader to draw her own conclusions based on a spare narration of "the facts".

At first Ivy defends herself against the false accusations, makes excuses for her husband, deludes herself about his affection for her—the classic victim of domestic abuse (1997: 151–52). But the constant beatings, that leave her semi-conscious, get the better of her fighting spirit and she learns not to contradict her abuser and to start screaming before the pain silences her, in the hope that others will intervene (1997: 152). But the onlookers do not intervene. There is only one man in the community who tries to protect Ivy from Elliot and Elliot kills him. Ivy's white and black abusers then close ranks and the murder is covered up by Jipp, who has his own reasons for not wanting a police enquiry (1997: 153). Nowra denounces the same lack of community protection for the contemporary victims of abuse:

> Many of these violent acts often occur in public, but no one steps in to help the woman, not even relatives. As one woman related [...]: 'I've seen women on the ground being kicked in the belly and in the head and no one went to help her. You just didn't do that. You could watch, but weren't allowed to butt into people's fights'. (2007a: 43)

So does "Breaking the Silence", but in less emotional terms. ACSAT reports "a culture of silence, denial, and inappropriate responses such as protecting the perpetrator rather than the child" (2006: 4).

The Aboriginal community of St. Dominic continues to spread vicious rumours about Ivy and explicitly blames "her promiscuous behaviour" for driving "a good man like Elliot" to violence. Ivy joins the ranks of the walking dead. When Jipp tries to talk to her, she remains silent, her face blank and looks right through him (1997: 154). Nowra describes the same phenomenon but, once again, in an emotional way that could be construed as self-righteous by the Aboriginal community:

> Some Aboriginal women become so resigned to their lot that they resemble sleepwalking targets for violence rather than active human beings. Tony Koch, in a report on Aboriginal domestic and sexual violence for the *Courier-Mail* in 1998, wrote that the girls and women have been beaten and raped so often that they seem to be what psychiatrists call 'ambulatory psychotics'. They walk through life, oblivious to the world around them, in an acute state of mental illness. (2007a: 42–43)

When Ivy gives birth, Jipp steals her baby and, when she pesters him about the child's whereabouts, he sets Elliot onto her. This time, Elliot's violence triggers a response of self-defence and she stabs him. Jipp has her shipped off to the church-controlled mental asylum where her psychological destruction is completed.

In the novel, this is not the only instance of complicity between the colonizer and the colonized man in a joint effort to prey on Aboriginal women. Jipp "allowed a small amount of power-sharing by giving a limited number of Aboriginal elders a place on the small Church Council of Elders" (1997: 31).

He is careful to choose those he can manipulate by giving them, in a parody of Christian marriage, the young girls they lust after. "Their cooperation was on the basis of what favours he gave them" (ibid.). The traditional elders also approve Jipp's forcing Elliot to marry Ivy. Their motivation is different from the missionary's, who does it to cover his own sins. As a result of his successful trip of enquiry to Ivy's mother's country, "Elliot had become a big-head" (1997: 123) and the elders do not wish to share their power and prestige with a young man. They see his marriage to the outcast as a way to cut him down to size. Once again, the Aboriginal woman is used as a pawn in a male power struggle that unites the colonizer and colonized. Similarly, Jipp is happy to encourage traditional superstition in order to serve his own interests. When two Aboriginal women and one man die under mysterious circumstances, he is eager to avoid an official enquiry and so goes about loudly blaming Ivy's mother for this spate of suicides. When the Aboriginal lay preacher, Delainy, goes one better, claiming that there are many black witches in the camp, Jipp "stored the notion in his mind" (1997: 71) for possible later use.

The final third of the novel is set in postcolonial times, from the Bicentenary (1988), and focuses on Mary, Ivy's stolen daughter, who was fostered by whites and has only just learnt about her Aboriginality in their will (209). Like many members of the Stolen Generations, she embarks on a search for her mother. She visits some Aboriginal communities, all of which are rife with violence, alcoholism, substance abuse, squalor and health problems (1997: 242–43, 263). Wright is clear about who is historically responsible for the problems of contemporary Aboriginal communities, referring to "[t]he socially engineered Aboriginal community—the result of decades of government interference" (1997: 263), but she fiercely eschews what Memmi refers to as "dolorism"[1] by firmly placing a share of responsibility at the door of Aboriginal elders—principally the men.

When we revisit the community currently living on the old site of St. Dominic's, we discover that those who were violent offenders against Aboriginal women—Delainy, the lay priest, who raped and tortured his young forcibly-married wife Gloria, and Elliot, who stripped Ivy of all her human rights—have stayed on and become respected elders, pillars of the community, while their victims still suffer from exclusion. Gloria lives in town but is shunned—"it seemed that Gloria was invisible to the whole community" (1997: 280)—while Ivy, more an outcast than ever, lives out in the bush and depends on Elliot to bring her groceries. He still controls her with the threat of physical violence

1 According to Memmi, "dolorism" is a natural tendency to blame one's suffering solely on others. He points out that the postcolonial tyrant takes great pains to encourage this state of mind because it exonerates him and his people from all responsibility to do anything about the terrible situation of disadvantage in their postcolonial community (Memmi 2004: 35).

and Ivy lives in terror of him (1997: 294). Instead of speaking, she growls like a wild animal and the rest of the community shuns and dismisses her as mad and evil. Even Mary, unaware that this shell of a human being is the mother she is searching for, recoils from Ivy (1997: 299).

Mary approaches the Council of Elders to ask them if they can help her find her mother. They know it is Ivy, but does not disclose. When Elliot takes Mary and her daughter Jess out to see Ivy, even though he does not reveal their kinship ties, the elders are furious with him and order Mary to leave at once. The community does not want the shameful secrets of the past raked up. Indeed a random remark evoking these dark secrets in public "triggered an eruption of disputes and rivalries, many of them decades old, that existed within the community. The unspoken had been spoken and gave rise to a free-for-all fight between opposing families" (1997: 279). Many people are seriously wounded.

According to the vision offered by this novel, Australia's Secret History concerns not only the history of white oppression of the aborigines, but also a history of violent oppression exercised over Aboriginal women by Aboriginal male elders, sometimes in collusion with the white colonizers. Furthermore, in Wright's fictional Aboriginal communities, while the local white oppressors have been removed, the Aboriginal oppressors, the men responsible for domestic violence, have now become respected community elders, so their victims are still subject to their power and silenced. This situation reflects the information given in the "Breaking the Silence" report and quoted earlier. In *Bad Dreaming*, Nowra goes further, contending that white judges are complicit in this form of continuing oppression[2]:

> Customary law or traditional law began to be used as a common defence [after 1967]. In 1980, an Aboriginal man, Ivan Panka, was angry with his wife because she refused to cook for him. He decided to punish her for being 'cheeky'. After thrashing her within an inch of her life, Panka shoved a piece of reinforcing steel up her vagina. His defence was that it was customary to beat a woman if she had provoked him. (Nowra 2007a: 30)

Although Nowra does not specifically say so, the reader is left to assume that this defence was accepted in court. Even if his aim—to alert the Australian public to the shocking plight of many Aboriginal women and children—was laudable in the absolute, he has undermined the legitimacy of his work through such lapses in scholarly precision and his voyeuristic representation of violence. Furthermore, his self-appointment as spokesman no doubt reminds

[2] See Behrendt and Watson (2008) for an analysis of Nowra's representation of the law's complicity in the abuse of indigenous women and children. They state, "[a]t first glance Nowra's arguments appear reasonable, but he ignores the complicated process behind sentencing".

the indigenous community of the two centuries when they were silenced by colonial discourse.

In his 2004 work, Memmi qualifies the guilty reluctance on the part of the ex-colonizer to interfere in human rights abuses by the ex-colonized as arrant cowardice masquerading as "cultural sensitivity" (2004: 15). Nowra certainly eschews this form of cowardice. Memmi adds that ex-colonized Arab intellectuals have a moral duty to use their ability for critical analysis to denounce human rights abuses in their postcolonial communities, even at the risk of exclusion from the community by fundamentalist leaders (ibid.: 47–52). He considers that they are failing in this duty but adds that women writers seem to be accomplishing it with more courage than their male counterparts (ibid.: 55). Wright's *Plains of Promise* and Pilkington's *Under the Wintamarra Tree* would certainly seem to support this claim in the Australian context. In *Bad Dreaming*, Nowra laments that there has not yet been an Australian film or novel that has addressed indigenous domestic violence in the gutsy way *Once Were Warriors* did in New Zealand (2007a: 79). Behrendt and Watson protest that "it is easy to make it look like Aboriginal people condone violence when you overlook all the Aboriginal voices that speak out against it". Nowra clearly has not read *Plains of Promise*, first published in 1997, because it does just that in a way that is both as hard-hitting and less sensational than his approach to the issue.

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9

The Place of the Folk Tale in a Changing Society

Helen Oronga Aswani Mwanzi
Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, Kenya

This chapter underscores the role of indigenous knowledge in the process of cementing relationships in a society that is becoming increasingly complex and impervious to values and etiquette. In the chapter the focus is on honesty and its opposite: dishonesty. I find dishonesty to be one vice that is capable of destroying the foundations of even the strongest nation. On the other hand, honesty has the power to rebuild even the most wretched of nations. A number of postcolonial states, which have experienced social and political unrest in the last sixty years have faced accusations of corruption in high places. Because corruption is a result of gross dishonesty that eventually supports impunity, the analysis of folk tales that extol honesty and highlight severe punishment for dishonesty is of relevance when discussing the danger lurking in marginalizing people's indigenous culture and arts.

The crucial place of the folk tale in a changing society is based on the assumption that in the folk tale is stored the wisdom of the people, such wisdom as has taken that people through years of storm, tribulations as well as pleasure. The recognition of this wisdom should cause communities to wish to keep going back to their oral literature. Yet in many countries of the world today, the search for wealth and improved technology has taken centre-stage in national planning policies. In Kenya, for instance, leaders have in the last five years become audibly obsessed with the phrase "wealth creation in a working nation". This focus has tended to rule out the arts and especially the folk tale. It is no longer strange to hear a parent ask what oral literature will help his/her child to achieve in this age of technology and technological advancement. Ironically, however, the same parent is distraught about the 27 December 2007 social holocaust that struck the country. This parent is not able to connect the absence of soul-nurturing folk tales with the heartless criminal mind that contemplated stealing victory and got a hitherto respected

Electoral Commission ordered to announce false presidential election results to the nation and to the world. The complaining parent will not see that it is only a soul bereft of values that fails to realize that dishonesty can only lead to an end to trust and the death of peaceful relationships, and that such a starved soul can only be in that state because of being denied access to the edifying folk tales of the people.

Recent events in Kenya have shown clearly that the Church cannot provide the kind of direction I am referring to. There are so many adherents to Church doctrine in this country that if that institution had the power that edifying folk tales have proved over the centuries to have, the tragic post-election events would have been nipped in the bud by just one courageous person of conviction telling the loser to accept his fate and hand over the office to the winner. Flouting rules of common decency is immoral, and folk tales do make it very clear that they exist as reference, as the standard against which to measure actions. It is, therefore, my contention that a changing society be exposed to the folk tale for the purposes of providing references in times of making crucial decisions. The three folk tales that I have chosen to discuss in this chapter are about honesty: one illustrates the role honesty plays in times of real, visible dilemma; the second one focuses on the painful results of dishonesty; while the third illustrates how the people of old rejected selfishness and dishonesty. In a changing society, I believe strongly that oral narratives have a central role to play in the process of building structures that are necessary for the maintenance of time-honoured moral values which in themselves are important to the creation and development of a cohesive society.

In the 1960s and early 70s when the young nation of Kenya was laying down its foundations, it was common to quote the Kiswahili proverb, *Mukosa mila ni mutumwa* ("A community without cultural roots is a slave community"). These were brave words from the founding fathers of the young Republic, and traditional dances were encouraged, especially at events graced by political leaders. Dancers from across the country traversed the Republic entertaining dignitaries with powerful visual messages of freedom to once more dance freely to our rhythms which high Anglican, Catholic and puritanical Presbyterian doctrines had suppressed. However, in all this fervour, something was missing; and even today, forty years after the inclusion in the university syllabus of oral literature, its power to affect behaviour has yet to be exploited in the effort to confront some of the most daunting social ills.

Hearing people bemoan increasing levels and incidents of corruption, conflict and crime, one would think that our lives, and the values that made them worth living, ceased with the arrival of colonialism and Western civilization, including religion and the new laws. It is true that society must change, but change should not be allowed to mean wilful decay, especially when there is a body of oral tradition that has the power to blow the whistle and halt the forces of decay. In

this chapter I examine one crucial value in human relationships—honesty as a requisite to peace. I argue that honesty is the one virtue that can be relied upon to uphold the dignity of humans. That we need honesty is exemplified in the three stories that I shall analyze in this chapter: "The Tortoise and the Maid", "The Ogre and the Squirrel" and "The Bride and the Flies". The tortoise is the archetypal wise individual whose actions are measured and have amazing results. Its nature is unique; it is said to live longer than normal human beings. Its slow pace, of seemingly deliberate, measured steps, epitomizes patience which has prompted the saying: *Njende kalaha yoola mumbo* ("The one designed to walk slowly reached the farthest west where the sun sets"). Juxtaposed to the patient, wise Tortoise, is the impatient, vain maiden in search of a perfect husband.

In the story of "The Tortoise and The Maid" a chief's daughter declares that she will only accept the man who can identify her by name. Since she and her sisters were well concealed and even when they went to the river or anywhere outside home, they did not usually call each other by name, she was sure that she would only marry a man who was interested in her genuinely enough to seek to know her name. She was elated. Her price was high. She could not imagine just any man getting the prize—her hand in marriage. At the same time, she was sure that such a price would land her in the hands of an extremely caring husband, the rare kind of man who would have spent invaluable time seeking to know the name of the woman he intended to marry. However, this challenge did not discourage eligible men at all; rather, it launched men of marriageable age into action to discover her name. They sought to know her favourite haunts: the paths she took to the river, the direction of the woods where she and her sisters gathered firewood, the path to the home of the beautician whom the village girls consulted. All these became important places in the quest for the elusive name. The men and their emissaries went all over the place. Meanwhile, the young women learnt of the flurry of activity set in motion by the announcement, and they decided to be on guard: no one was to refer to any of the sisters by name until after the contest. As a result, no one could find the name through eavesdropping. All the eligible men tried to remain within earshot of the coveted girl, but no one could discover her name.

However, one individual whom no one considered, or even thought of as a possible contender, was Tortoise. He knew the girls normally relaxed within the walls of their father's palace, and during such times, they called out to each other not by name but by certain identities. With time he had ascertained that they normally referred to each other by their natural identities. What he did not know and needed time to ascertain was which features referred to which maiden. So he endeavoured to know the unique features of each one of the young women. He stationed himself at a vantage point from which to spy on

the young women. With time he was able to identify each one of them by a distinctive mark or skin colour. After this, he relaxed and bided his time. Then one day luck smiled on him when, without expecting to see or hear any of the usual jovial chatting from the courtyard, he saw the girl with the beauty gap between her teeth (*esang'ali* or *imbenya*) accidentally drop what looked to him like a special gourd. At that instant all the sisters who witnessed the accident called out the name Imbenya. They also teased her about the disappointment awaiting the winner of the prize she had made herself to be. Tortoise was relieved; he was suddenly elated; he stretched his neck to its limit and what he saw clearly confirmed that she was the bearer of the name *Imbenya* (another word for e*sang'ali*) and that she was the prized one, and that the name of the beautiful one was Imbenya. He retired to his home and waited for the competition to be called. Fortunately, he did not have to wait for long. Yet, on the day of the competition Tortoise was not the first one to arrive. He took his time so that he got in the arena at the time when all was set and the competitors were simply waiting for the whistle to signal them to start. This made his entry visible as well as dramatic. He caused a stir, and giggles filled the air. Then the competition started, and there was a lot of excitement as one suitor after another failed the test.

Finally it was Tortoise's turn. He stepped forward to call out the maiden by name. Tension mounted as he started stuttering. Laughter and derisive remarks greeted his belaboured effort to speak intelligibly. Every movement of his body demonstrated the effort he was putting into the activity of guesswork and speech. Then, to everyone's shock, he called out, "Imbenya, that is your name! You are called Imbenya", Tortoise repeated for all to hear. The giggling, laughing and teasing changed into stony silence. There was total disbelief. The young maiden led the pack; she could not believe what she was hearing. She could not put together the truth that Tortoise had uttered and the being that had uttered the words. She started crying, but her father told her simply, "Join your husband. He is waiting to take you home. You made the decree, so you must abide by it. Tortoise has called you by name. He has fulfilled the only condition you placed for the man who should be your husband. Step forward for my blessing, both of you". Imbenya felt trapped; she hesitated; then she stepped forward and said, "I made the condition. I will not go back on my word. I will go with Tortoise, for he has cared for me enough to know my name". Immediately after this acceptance speech, the ceremony was performed. There was heavy feasting during which she was showered with praises and blessings. Finally, Tortoise and Imbenya were escorted by the young men and women of the community to their new home as a couple.

An examination of this narrative reveals clearly the unwavering nature of honesty. Imbenya is young, but she knows the value of honesty. Much as she is initially revolted by the winner of the competition that she herself initiated,

she comes to her senses and realises that the only decent thing to do is to fulfil her promise and accept to marry the winner—Tortoise. Her father too is impressive as he is depicted urging the young woman to honour her pledge. It is a combination of honesty and a keen sense of justice which prompts him to command her to do the decent thing—honour a promise made of her own volition. Hence, Imbenya, a young woman who is directed to honour her promise, serves as a role model to young audiences of the narrative across the region where it is told. The story ends with the proverb, *Indakano ne likobi* ("a promise is a debt"). It is a proverb that has the power to guide any community across the globe to avert situations likely to lead to misunderstanding and war.

Analysis of this story brings forth several possibilities. First, it has the power to evoke admiration for the young woman's sense of fairness. This is done by the contrast the narrative draws between the physical appearance and poise of the beautiful maiden and Tortoise. That he should be a contender in this match among the Who's Who in the arena of the handsome ones is significant. This contrast enhances the admiration that Imbenya's acceptance of him evokes in the last scene of the story. Using hyperbole, the narrative highlights the theme of appearance versus essence. Tortoise has certainly spent precious time searching for the answer to the puzzle; he has displayed courage, patience and wit. The story is silent on what the other competitors have been doing meanwhile, giving the impression that they have not done much by way of ensuring success. The conclusion an audience is left with is the premium the story places on courage, patience, wit and the even higher premium on honesty, for it is the exercise of faith in the undying power of honesty and trust that can move a father to overlook the contrast between the couple and order his daughter to marry Tortoise. In other words, the hyperbole is extolling the demand for sacrifice which honesty may make on an individual or even a community. In the same vein, the incongruity that the narrative exploits is a metaphor for the rough and unpleasant experiences that the quest for trust and peace forced on those in search of them. To choose honesty that establishes trust, which in turn nurtures the context for peace to thrive, may sometimes be as challenging as having all the handsome men who have failed the test and accept the unsightly fellow who has passed the test by the prescribed marking scheme. In the changing society in which we live today, I can say with confidence that there is need for this edifying narrative. Quoting it to a politician tempted to flout the spirit and letter of a memorandum of understanding on grounds of personal vanity and selfishness, is likely to prompt a re-examination of the contemplation to back out. That the story totally excludes the feelings and comments of the losers is also of value to our changing society. In a situation where change is leading to increasing arrogance and impunity, the silencing of those competitors who are initially confident and arrogant to the extent that they make derisive remarks at

the humble-looking Tortoise causes this narrative to be invaluable in a changing society.

The next folk tale I am going to use is an animal story. There are two characters: the Ogre and the Squirrel (Nakhamuna). Once again we come across the use of contrast as a technique. Squirrel is the archetypal villain—a sly, ruthless exploiter. So long as he is comfortable, other people's inconvenience or pain is nothing to him. On the other hand, there is Ogre who stands out as the archetypal victim of villainy—slow-witted, trusting but a lethal avenger. These two are not far from the personalities we find in our changing society. In the process of telling the story of human greed that inevitably leads to conflict and hatred, the folk tale uses oral poetry to summarize the action of either character at a time when explanation will not be appropriate. The song communicates the painful truth in a manner that initially entertains the intended audience—Ogre, and later Squirrel. The poetry carries emotions of derision which, as they get interpreted, cause anger. In the story we have the two characters, Squirrel and Ogre remaining friends until Squirrel breaks the friendship through dishonesty. These two did everything together. They trusted each other. One season they decided to plough and plant a field together. This was when their friendship was put to the test. Ogre worked for long hours during the day; Squirrel claimed that his best working hours were at night. When the time for weeding came, the same thing happened, but Ogre still trusted his friend. Finally, it was time to harvest. This is when Squirrel really decided to work in the night. He assured Ogre that it was not healthy to work in the fields when it was so hot; he did this knowing that his friend was such a heavy sleeper that there would be no night when he would give up his sleep for any work, however valuable. Squirrel had a field day. He went to the farm during the night and met Ogre during the day to give him a report on the progress of the work. He eventually gathered the entire crop and stored it all away. He did not disclose the location of the stores to his friend even as he talked of how great the harvest had been. Then one day, after the two had had a meal of maize minus the expected monkey nuts, Ogre ventured to raise concern about the newly harvested monkey nuts. Squirrel (Nakhamuna) responded thus:

Nakhanani yalima omukunda	Poor Ogre dug the farm
Narakamwo tsimbande	And he planted monkey nuts
Nyinga litukhu liokhuchesa	When the harvest day came
Nakhamuna yachesa	Sly Squirrel harvested it all
Oh oho ho ho ho	Oh! Oho ho ho
Lero nakhole mbwe ko?	What shall I do today?
Oh oh ho ho ho	Oh! Oh ho ho
Lero nakhole mbwe ko?	What shall I do today?

Ogre listened to the song carefully, but he did not figure out its exact meaning while it was being sung. Squirrel appeared to enjoy the dry meal. Ogre was

obviously suffering, but he did not speak out. This went on until one day Ogre decided to stalk Squirrel. He followed his footprints until he got to one of the stores where Squirrel was comfortably sitting, eating monkey nuts with relish. Ogre did not say anything. He repeated this until he had discovered all the stores. He was so angry that he set fire to all of them and went back home to wait for Squirrel's reaction. For a while there was no response. Then one day he went to his friend's house for lunch and watched him serve the dry meal once more. One thing that Ogre noted was the absence of the usual mirth. He went a second time, and on this occasion Ogre found his friend genuinely sad; he had even lost weight. Then Ogre sang to him:

Nakhamuna, Nakhamuna	Squirrel, Squirrel
Khalitsanga tsinjuku tsiabene	The sly one is eating others' groundnuts
Ndi ndi ndi	Ndi ndi ndi ndi
Nakhamuna, Nakhamuna	Squirrel, Squirrel
Khalitsanga tsinjuku tsiabeene	The sly one is eating others' groundnuts
Ndi ndi ndi ndi	Ndi ndi ndi ndi
Nakhamuna oralimanga	Squirrel who does not plough
Ndi ndi ndi ndi	Ndi ndi ndi ndi
Khalitsanga tsinjuku tsia beene	The sly one is eating others' groundnuts
Ndi ndi ndi ndi	Ndi ndi ndi ndi
Ndahuka butswa	I am exceedingly amazed
Khamuna yalama	Squirrel cried for help
Ndahuka butswa	I am still amazed
Khamuna yalama	Squirrel pleaded for mercy
Oh Khamuna yalama	Oh Squirrel cried out
Ndahuka butswa	I am still exceedingly amazed
Khamuna yalama	Squirrel cried out,
Esindu munda !	"Something strange is in my tummy!"

Squirrel listened carefully to the song. It had a derisive tone and Ogre evinced a lot of enjoyment as he swayed rhythmically, his tail brushing Squirrel provokingly. Squirrel joined in the dance before grasping the words of the song. Then the words pricked him and he looked at Ogre sharply. The singing must stop, but all efforts to interrupt the song and dance failed as the singer boomed louder and louder. Squirrel had no choice but to flee the scene. Their friendship ended that day.

Once again we have a story that underscores the importance of honesty. A long-time friendship is destroyed by one moment of dishonesty. Ogre discovers the lie, the betrayal and the cynicism, and he is offended. He plans to use wit just as Squirrel used wit to deceive and dispossess him. He composes a song using words that will communicate to sly Squirrel that he is not as clever as he imagined, for his mean act has been found out. Ogre talks about groundnuts while the seeds and nuts harvested were monkey nuts. This interchange directs the attention of the miscreant away from his crime since what he stole was

monkey nuts and not groundnuts. The twist may initially cause Squirrel to get comforted by the feeling that the victim of his slyness is unaware of the trick, and that he is singing about another squirrel who stole groundnuts planted by another farmer other than Ogre. In ignorance the miscreant may even dance to the rhythm of the song before he realises that it refers to him. Thus, the interchange blunts the barb of the song so that the target—Squirrel—can listen to it and even dance to its rhythm before fleeing in shame.

An examination of Ogre's song leads to the submission that a victim of dishonesty, who is conceived of the mistaken notion that his victim is too foolish to discern the truth, has the power to change from the conventional naïve underdog into a fierce protester against abuse of his thinking capability. For instance Ogre, who is known for innate foolishness, is provoked to act. He carries out three distinctively creative actions: suspecting Squirrel's crime, searching and finding the stores and composing a song appropriate to the occasion. That he gets Squirrel to dance to the rhythm of a song that is making fun of his famished state ("Squirrel cried /something strange is in my tummy") after his sumptuous stores were burnt is clever. Dishonesty and meanness have transformed Ogre.

The lesson Ogre's song has for a changing society is poignant: that a sly élite class designing plans to exploit the populace should be aware of the possibility that this same seemingly uninformed and naïve population can be transformed by the dishonesty being visited upon it. Unlike the song by Squirrel, which is overtly rude to the loser, referring directly to the thief and the stolen goods—monkey nuts—Ogre's song uses innuendo, preferring to substitute monkey nuts with groundnuts. In this contrast can be seen the impact of impunity: the resulting anger can cause the exploited to do the least expected thing, including communicating about the revenge slyly. Ogre, the victim of impunity in this narrative, composes a song with a derisive message to mock his exploiter, but he does not mention his role in Squirrel's misery—the pangs of hunger. The only hint to the trouble he has caused his arrogant friend-turned-foe is veiled in the words: "I am still exceedingly amazed/Squirrel cried out/ 'Something strange is in my stomach'." This slyness causes Ogre to sound diplomatic, a virtue that is hardly ever used in reference to him (Ogre). The diplomacy works perfectly, highlighting the irony of Squirrel's situation as he dances to the rhythm of a song whose words are underscoring his foolishness. The audience is aware that the exploited has had his revenge and only wishes to let his adversary know that he has been discovered and punished and that he is not too clever to be caught, neither is he immune to punishment. Who is the cleverer and the more creative of the two becomes clear: it is Ogre.

Thus, the contrast between the two songs should serve the changing society with the suggestion that folk tales along with their songs lay bare the social ills under scrutiny. For instance, Squirrel's song that is so dull when compared

to Ogre's lively one symbolizes the weight of sin embedded in that song that he (Squirrel) has committed against Ogre. The sin of lying for benefit cannot nurture creativity.

Like the story about Imbenya and Tortoise, the story about Squirrel and Ogre was originally told to young men and women in preparation for taking their place in the world of responsible adults. It is significant that it ends with the condemnation of the sly character whose business is to calculate how to defraud others and live at their expense. The people's philosophy comes through: no one will be allowed to benefit from ill-gotten wealth; hence the burning of the nut stores and the story's symbolic affirmation of the act is based on the people's ritual of searing the hands of anyone caught stealing. In other words the story is an expression of the people's hopes for a thief-free society. For decades the aspirations of the simple pre-colonial communities as seen in oral narratives such as this suffered a heavy blow at the hands of the modern literature that was imported either from Europe or America. Today, societies in Africa are paying the price of allowing the people's aspirations as espoused in their oral narratives to take a back seat while those that are foreign to the continent thrive using the dominant world literature as their vehicle. The price is impunity and the attendant corruption and suffering unleashed on the people.

Squirrel's sly behaviour evoked in the youth a revulsion against corruption, highlighting the moral that corrupt dealings could only lead to enmity; it could only lead to the death of the necessary warm human relationships which are a prerequisite for peace. That there can be no peace until there is trust among people seeking to establish it is brought out in this story in which Squirrel's peace and comfort are finally disrupted simply because no one can enjoy peace alone; peace is not an individual experience; it can only be experienced in a social context. Thus, in the two characters the audience was able to see a slice of society.

In the course of the story Squirrel is condemned on two levels: he is lazy and he is a thief, an exploiter. This makes the story relevant to our time. However, the possibility that it will influence decisions for the good of all is slim simply because in the changing society reference is made to teachings found in what is conventionally considered world religious texts. Oral literature texts being largely confined to the tribal languages of their origin, their usefulness is doomed to remain unknown or even ignored.

Finally, I shall refer to the story "The Bride and the Flies". The relevance of the story lies in its reference to dishonesty that leads to death. In the narrative we have a newly-married woman who is exposed to a new dish upon settling in her marital home. She discovers that the small insects which are served to her husband and her father-in-law in the dimness of twilight are flies. She becomes curious and wants to taste them, but she does not share her intention

with anyone so that when she stealthily eats one and finds it extremely tasty, she has no way of expressing her discovery. Unknown to her is the fact that she needs to be ritually introduced to the clan delicacy. Unfortunately the urge to taste grows by the day until she eats the whole pot of flies, and that is when her problems begin. The search for the thief began, and it took long to discover the culprit. Then a rope was tied to the stem of a tree on the bank of a lake and the loose end was flung across the lake and tied to another tree. The rope was tightened and all the young women married in the homestead were asked to walk on the rope singing:

Nindi esie owalia tsisi	If it is I who ate the flies
Owalia tsiisi tsia Nyakhusaala	Who ate the flies of Mother-in-law?
Mukoye katukha engwe munyanza	Rope, snap that I may fall in the lake
Mukoye katukha engwe munyanza	Rope, snap that I may fall in the lake

One by one the young women sang as they balanced on the tight rope. Finally, the turn of the bride who had eaten the whole pot of flies came. She walked onto the rope and sang as she crossed, as every other woman before her had done, but when she got to the middle of the journey across the lake, the rope snapped and she fell into the water. Now, the centre of the lake was too far from the shore for any swimmer to rescue the poor woman. She died singing the damning song.

Once again we find the people's indigenous knowledge being enriched by a story whose aim is to indict selfishness and dishonesty. The first reason for the punishment is the selfish decision to eat all the food, leaving nothing for anyone else. The second reason is the deliberate act of setting out to lie to the entire community. These two reasons make the story relevant to the changing society in which we witness and decry impunity. The audience is treated to the selfish act of taking everything for oneself, and then that of adding insult to injury by posturing to be innocent.

Thus, the narrative communicates the simple message that the people of old abhorred selfishness and dishonesty, for they knew that the culprit of the heinous act of eating what was meant for everyone would fall into the lake and drown. Nevertheless, they used the method of crossing while appealing to the rope to snap and drop the singer into the deep water of the lake. In other words, a thief deserved no mercy; a greedy person, metaphorically referred to as a hyena, deserved no pity. The punishment was expected to discriminate and punish the miscreant, and it did just that. The young audience to whom this narrative was told was, thus, exposed to the workings of poetic justice. Like the modern thief who damns him/herself by lying on oath in court, the young woman in this story damns herself. However, unlike the bride in the story, who sings damnation to herself and receives the full force of the unwritten law against such a crime, the modern thief apparently gets away with the crime.

This, in my view, is the cause of the increasing cases of impunity. The changing society needs its edifying narratives if it hopes to fight this vice.

It is significant that this story and the one about Squirrel and Ogre are woven around foods considered tasty in the community: monkey nuts, groundnuts and flies. This meeting point is important to the point I wish to emphasize that the people of old cherished the spirit of sharing, and sharing food considered most delicious was one way of expressing good neighbourliness. To tame greed is to show a high sense of discipline; it is to show readiness to cultivate healthy personal relationships; to be human. To refuse to do so is to be anti-social and to alienate oneself from society so that the death of such a person is not a loss. This kind of commitment to the process of eliminating evil deserves to be preserved for reference and as support material in the fight against selfishness, dishonesty and corruption.

In conclusion, it is pertinent to suggest that the folk tale has an important function in a changing society as in it are embedded the eternal human values of honesty, kindness, fair play and constant search for peace among others. Because of this, those obstacles that stand in the way of increased use of the folk tale (writing and publishing of the texts in local tribal languages being two of the leading obstacles) need to be addressed and eliminated for the creation of useful indigenous references in matters touching on morality and life as a whole.

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10

In Search of Wisdom
Transformations in Indigenous and Postcolonial Discourses

VERA ALEXANDER
University of Aarhus, Denmark

INTRODUCTION

One does not encounter the word "wisdom" much in academic discussions of literature. However, this is not to say that one does not encounter any wisdom whatsoever, but the term does not appear very frequently in literary criticism. The word has a ring of otherness about it. If at all, wisdom would seem to be a topic best left to arcane, esoteric writers or the producers and consumers of success education literature. In the context of scholarship, it might seem to be more relevant to disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, possibly psychology, surely religious and theological studies or the history of ideas.

Wisdom in most western European traditions is related to knowledge, learning and reason, but encompasses a semantic dimension that goes beyond rationality and adds to it a holistic dimension of individual experience, character and lived discipline.[1] The usage of the term in English ranges from definitions equating wisdom with common sense and sound judgement on the one hand, to abstract notions of an ideal associated with overtones of the sacrosanct and liminal or even decontextualised, facile aphorisms on the other.

To connect literature and wisdom means to address the complex relationship between literature, myth, folklore and storytelling traditions. Moreover, there is no neat template conceptualising this relationship, for instance by suggesting that one simply encompasses the other. The concept of wisdom is too large and complex to function as a theme within literature, even if some fictional

1 More detailed overviews of wisdom as a "field of inquiry" and working definitions of wisdom in relation to intelligence can be found in Sternberg (2000: 631–49; 1990).

characters may be constructed as being in possession of wisdom, or if a text can be said to have a moral that can be paraphrased as a "piece" of wisdom. In religious texts and contexts, narratives are used as means of illustrating aspects of wisdom. Wisdom can moreover be said to have a metafictional quality in that it refuses to be contained by text and thereby points to its boundaries as well as its motivations.

By virtue of being a somewhat uncomfortable and challenging term, wisdom can be a useful concept in an analysis that deals with the border-zones and interfaces between postcolonial and indigenous discourses, not least because wisdom, often tied to eco-critical messages, frequently appears among stereotypes associated with representations of native cultures of North America as well as other indigenous peoples.[2] In her survey of themes and motivations articulated in native Canadian writing of the Native Renaissance, Stephanie MacKenzie (2007) even speaks of a "wisdom literature", arguing that the image of native wisdom stems from the social status and authority position from which many writers speak. She writes: "The first wave of Aboriginal writers of the 1960s and 1970s was not simply of an older generation; these people were, for the most part, also spiritual leaders or authoritative commentators on the past" (2007: 81).[3]

However, the "language, or languages, of a faith-inflected literature which dominates the literature of the Native Renaissance" (MacKenzie 2007: 81) is only a part of the spectrum of what wisdom encompasses, and not by far the one which challenges Western readers and academics the most. Rather than add to the large number of texts discussing creations and subversions of this image in First Nations writings of the twentieth century, I will focus on aspects of the trickster as a wisdom figure in Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst's rewriting

[2] In his essay "Getting it Right: Images of Indigenous Peoples in Canadian Fiction in the Eighties", Terry Goldie names a few of the stereotypes of the native—"sex, violence, orality or the state of 'nonwriting', mysticism and the prehistoric, the sense of the indigene as past in the present or as being out of time" (1988: 65). Having submitted the act of stereotyping of the indigene to semiotic analysis, he proceeds to examine how these stereotypes are both re-thought and re-created in a number of writings from the 1980s. In the course of his analysis, Goldie focuses on different conceptualizations of history, and, perhaps inevitably, on the importance of language and translation as acts, which involves cultural bridging and explanations.

[3] MacKenzie further explains this label as follows: "Whether one terms the literature of the Native Renaissance sacrio-religious, faith-based, pantheistic, or spiritually inflected, one cannot disregard that this literature both instructs and inspires, and that it is bound up, at many twists and turns, with ceremony" (2007: 83). Paula Gunn Allen gives an extensive analysis of the status and all-pervasive role of spirituality and mystic traditions in "American Indian" cultures, which sheds light on how problematic even such lables as "faith-based" are, given that in the "tribal traditions" she works with, there is "no clear line between sacred and secular" (1998: 45).

of Haida aetiological myth, *The Raven Steals the Light* (1984), examining how references to indigenous and colonial histories are incorporated in a manner which forges together criticism and burlesque humour.[4]

In doing so, I would like to offer a contribution to the debate on interfaces between postcolonial and indigenous studies that emphasizes the need for a perspective which views these two as distinct, interdependent and overlapping fields of artistry and enquiry. This chapter views indigenous or tribal studies as one of the current frontiers of (though not *in*) postcolonial and transcultural studies which invite these two disciplines to critically examine their own degrees of Westernization, tendency towards conformity and homogenization and, ultimately, flexibility of mind. In this negotiation the vestiges of wisdom figures and voices can be perceived to play a part, and, possibly, even a comic one.

Indigenous Pockets in a Postcolonial Bag?

Sub-section VII in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995) combines "Indigeneity" with "Ethnicity", labelling the subjects "two of the most vexed and complex issues in postcolonial theory" (1995: 213). But whether, or to what extent, they really are issues *in* postcolonial theory is the subject of considerable contention, with critics coming to different conclusions depending on which region or nation or specification within postcolonialism they are concerned with. While there are areas of overlap between postcolonial and indigenous literatures and discourses, this relationship gives rise to considerations which go beyond aesthetics or style. The identity debate revolves around common issues such as the shared, yet different experience of dispossession in terms of space and the land, time and history (knowing and telling one's own stories), voice and language (the search for ways of telling one's stories).

While postcolonial and indigenous artists share an interest in examining these and related subjects, the writer and critic Thomas King has taken issue with an inclusion of indigenous Canadian studies in postcolonial discourse. In an influential essay published in 1990, the editor of *All My Relations* categorically rejects all familial bonds with the postcolonial:

> Pre-colonial literature, as we use the term in North America, has no relationship whatsoever to colonial literature. The two are neither part of a biological or natural cycle nor does the one anticipate the other, while the full complement of terms—pre-colonial. colonial, and postcolonial—reeks of unabashed ethnocentrism and

[4] The focus on a Canadian example is prompted by the complex layering of indigenous and immigrant voices, which can be compared to other former settler colonies, though not profitably so within the confines of this chapter.

> well-meaning dismissal, and they point to a deep-seated assumption that is at the heart of most well-intentioned studies of Native literature.[5] (King: 1990)

King goes on to outline why he feels that postcolonialism would displace rather than boost indigenous culture:

> While postcolonialism purports to be a method by which we can begin to look at those literatures which are formed out of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, the colonized and the colonizer, the term itself assumes that the starting point for the discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America. At the same time, the term organizes the literature progressively suggesting that there is both progress and improvement. No less distressing, it also assumes that the struggle between guardian and ward is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature, providing those of us who write with method and topic. And, worst of all, the idea of postcolonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in pace before colonialism ever became a questions, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression. Ironically, while the term itself—postcolonial— strives to escape to find new centres, it remains, in the end, a hostage to nationalism.
>
> As a contemporary Native writer, I am quite unwilling to make these assumptions, and I am quite unwilling to use these terms. (Ibid.: 242–43)

His dismissal concludes: "Postcolonial might be an excellent term to use to describe Canadian literature, but it will not do to describe Native literature" (ibid.: 243).

Obviously, labels such as the "postcolonial" are in wide circulation not only because of the things they get right, but also because of the things they get wrong. Terms that are beyond dispute stand little chance of becoming terms for discussion. Some of King's assumptions about the Eurocentricity of postcolonialism and especially the threat to native traditions perhaps seem exaggerated from today's perspective[6]; after all, the field of postcolonialism continues to evolve, and fortunately not in a way that merely finds or constructs "new centres" while remaining within the limiting discourses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The validity of implications such as centrality and implied hegemony of European colonialism and its discourses

[5] Stirringly titled "Godzilla versus Postcolonial", the text discusses the eponymous binarism in a way which is quite dismissive of the postcolonial label. For further details, see Heble, Pennee and Struthers (1997: 242).

[6] It must be noted that King is not alone in aligning postcolonialism with Eurocentricity and reading it as a neo-colonial discourse. Historian Howard Adams is just as emphatic when he states: "Eurocentricism, as an ideology, is the major contributor to the continuing devastation and suppression of Aboriginal civilizations. It has progressed unchecked and has flourished through the imperial control of all media forms and, therefore, public opinion" (1995: 27).

of power and progress is after all being challenged from within the field. Still, the appropriation which Judith Leggatt tentatively describes as "the academic colonization that could be implicit in postcolonialism" (2003: 119) exists, and not merely on the level of rhetoric.

King proceeds to suggest and test a number of alternatives, "vantage points" rather than "bags" (1990: 244), that he finds more suitable to the purposes of native writers—"tribal, interfusional, polemical and associational" (ibid.: 243). Thirteen years later, Leggatt, in her comparison of King with Lee Maracle, diagnoses: "Both King and Maracle make arguments that ... attack the label applied to postcolonialism but not the theories the term encompasses" (2003: 116). It seems to me, however, that this describes only a part of the problem, as several different transactions intermingle in the exchange between King and Leggatt.

King's terms are not submitted as substitutions for the postcolonial, but as preferences (1990: 243). Their main function is different from that of postcolonialism, despite the fact that they all share the function of grouping texts together. What King's suggestions mainly achieve, quite explicitly at the very end of his essay, is to highlight the importance of individual choice and to raise the question of how such an element of choice can be accommodated within postcolonialism, or can make itself heard. This is a valuable input for a rethinking not so much of voice but of postcolonial listening strategies.

In confronting indigenous versus postcolonial issues, the question can no longer be whether or not the indigene can or should be included in the category of the postcolonial. The inclusion has been made many times, in critical or theoretical books, as mentioned, and in university courses. This decision strikes a balance between political and practical considerations, as Terry Goldie points out:

> At York 'postcolonial' is a collective term for the literatures of the former British Commonwealth, a usage common elsewhere. This does not deny that many other literatures have relationships with colonialism and imperialism but they don't appear in an English department. This usage is thus not precise but at best reasonable, and first of all pragmatic. ... [P]ostcolonial seems a better grab-bag than most. (1988: 301)

After all, this "grab-bag" contains tools to structure debates on cultural encounters, identity, marginalization, hybridity and issues of hegemony and disempowerment. The field of postcolonialism has opened a market for the production of ideas and texts as well as an entire catalogue of theories and terminologies which have become established and no longer exclusively apply to postcolonial literatures.

But there are limits to expanding the field, and downsides to making it "all-inclusive". Postcolonialism has been and continues to be accused of eliminating

or downplaying necessary distinctions between individual cultures and nations which are subsumed under the postcolonial label mainly on account of their shared experience of loss and marginalization, rather than individual choices and characteristics, many of which are lost, not least due to the dominance of colonial languages. In this context, indigenous studies seems to face the tiring prospect of having to struggle for emancipation on two different fronts. At the same time, critics also acknowledge that this circumstance can be viewed as a positive challenge as the ambiguous politics of inclusion and exclusion invite a re-examination of the principles of the respective disciplines, especially with regard to the question of how alliances are formed in each of them and how individual and collective voices and messages are equilibrated.

Leggatt points out that many controversies in the texts she examines focus on postcolonialism as a label, not a method (2003: 113). As a result, they end up constructing a new binarism of native versus non-native or Western which rearticulates issues which postcolonial theories have already written against. Her observation that some proposed solutions in texts rejecting postcolonialism resemble postcolonial ones (2003: 115) suggests that somewhere in the dialogue between indigenous and postcolonial theory there is an element of cognitive dissonance, a hitch in communication between critics whose different use of similar terminology results in the erroneous conception that they are speaking of different facts when indeed they reach similar conclusions through different pathways—or different solutions that sound similar to readers of different backgrounds.[7]

Perhaps this is where some indigenous contributions to the postcolonial landscape could lie: in pointing out that postcolonialism need neither be aggressive nor defensive, that postcolonial ideas change shape, depending on the pace of the reader, and that searching for and empowering voices must be balanced out by a search for improved strategies of reading and listening. Leggatt notes something to this effect when she charts some tendencies she ascribes to the gradual transformation of academic discourses through the advent of more native academics. Through them, she is induced to formulate a list of individual commitments to learn more about indigenous modes of thinking and speaking, an even closer self-policing as regards terminology and a willingness to question the backgrounds and limitations of her own belief structures. The change of tone that can be perceived at the end of this chapter exemplifies what I mean by a different listening strategy, a way of positioning

[7] In this context it is interesting to observe that Leggatt's text works with a double dichotomy. She interlaces the question of postcolonial versus indigenous with the question of how academic discourse and literary creativity can communicate with one another. This is motivated by an awareness of pitfalls created by the different modes of expression, as for instance the potentially invasive effects of a critical reading of native writing that is unaware of its own hegemonic backgrounds.

oneself as a critic and reader which focuses on asking questions rather than positing theories and answers.[8] It is this personalised discursive turn, which to me signals the presence of something that can be named wisdom, or ascribed to this concept.

Postcolonialism changes, as do attitudes towards the label. A recent book edited by Hartmut Lutz which deals with many of the issues listed as concerns of both indigenous and postcolonial studies, most prominently, space and identity, manages to do without the label, juxtaposing instead the related perspectives of indigenous and immigrant writing.

> Within a polyvocal, polylingual, multicultural Canada, people are conjoined not by race but by place. Learning from the common ground and braiding together the Indigenous and Immigrant narrative strands without blurring the boundaries or discarding storylines that are painfully unpleasant is a process that seems to have begun. (Lutz 2007: 21)

Listening to "elders" or listening more closely to anyone who speaks and the humble stance demanded by Goldie are, however, not the only aspects of wisdom that need to be considered in the encounter of indigenous and postcolonial discourses. These are closely related to forms of politeness or political correctness and hence not particularly controversial or hard to grasp. This is why I now turn to a text which can be regarded as an aspect of wisdom literature in its wider sense, and which challenges such seriousness, moderation and solemnity with a reminder of the educational function of laughter as an epistemological tool.

Trickster Wisdom

Tricksters are ambivalent, even paradoxical figures that have some divine features, such as immortality and the superhuman ability to change shape. However, they are no benevolent superior creatures, which command awe or worship, but rather bumbling, egotistical, child-like, wilful, opportunistic and often downright silly beings that run from one scrape into the next, making mistakes, playing pranks on humans and animals and subscribing to no fixed moral code. If one tries to fit this figure into Western thought, the trickster can be said to carry connotations of picaresque traditions, comedy, or even burlesque. Taking these unusual ingredients into account, to subsume this figure under the heading of wisdom is challenging, at least to Western concepts of what the term encompasses. At the same time, the particular trickster figure discussed

[8] Leggatt's text is not the only example. Terry Goldie begins and ends his discussion of indigenous images with a word that sounds just as unusual in an academic discourse as wisdom, humility: "a partial answer might be examined: humility. We *won't* get it right That simple admission could be a start" (Goldie 1988: 80).

below, Raven in Haida creation stories, is the core figure in a foundation myth, i.e. a body of stories which is constitutive of a group's identity and cultural memory and which illustrate fundamental aspects about how the world has come about and what role human beings are meant to play in it.[9]

In his recent "The Ever-Travelling Trickster", Mark Shackleton surveys major contributions to the study of trickster figures and asserts that the central aspect in the Western response to the trickster figure is that it "has been polarized, simplified and demonized in the post-Renaissance Western imagination" (2007: 74), its ambiguities simplified and falsified: "The fact that Trickster is *both* a culture hero and a buffoon has been difficult for the dualistic Western mind to grasp" (2007: 79). Shackleton concludes that the trickster's inherent resistance to Western thought patterns has confirmed its status as "a figure of survival" (2007: 81).[10] His capacity to elude (Western) categorization makes the trickster into a feature of native writing that approximates the concept of wisdom.

The Raven Steals the Light was published in 1984.[11] The text is told in two parallel narratives, challenging conventions of how to read. On the one hand, there is a verbal narrative, formulated by Robert Bringhurst, on the other, each of the ten stories is prefaced by a drawing produced by Bill Reid.[12] Having long been one of the lost arts silenced in the colonial period (a genealogy of Haida story-telling, or, as Bill Reid phrases it, "bardic tradition" (1984: 13), formline

[9] The premise and outcome of Stephanie MacKenzie's analysis of the comprehensive role of myth in Canadian native literature can serve as further support for linking tricksters with wisdom as both fulfil common functions.

[10] Margaret Atwood's famous keyword for the predicament of Canadian literature has particular resonance in the context of indigenous writing, as can also be argued with reference to the native American Gerald Vizenor's concept of Survivance.

[11] Not a great deal of literary criticism has been produced in response to the book, the only exceptions being brief obituaries for the artist Bill Reid, who died in 1998. This lack of response could be due to the text's liminal position as a literary work. It is not a piece of original writing, it is much rather a rewriting of stories, myths and legends of the Haida people that seems to belong to ethnography rather than literary studies. The cycle of Raven narratives is in fact prefaced by an anthropologist's introduction as well as artist Bill Reid's "Prologue" and writer Robert Bringhurst's introductory remarks on Haida Gwaii as setting. Having been rendered in English, this rewriting can moreover be classified as a translation and it textualizes what used to be pieces of orature. This brief characterization already suggests in which ways this piece of native rewriting challenges the scope of literature.

[12] It is more correct to speak of a double narrative, rather than an illustrated single one as the representational form of Reid's painting, Haida formline, is not just an artistic style, but can be regarded—read—as a language in its own right that tells the story using reconstructed Haida codes. For further details, see Holm (1965), Inverarity (1967) and Ruby and Brown (1981).

is now being rediscovered and redeveloped.[13] While damaged and interrupted by the colonial process, this form of expression is now in recovery and like the trickster figure itself, signifies the survival of aspects of a native Canadian culture the context of which was lost and silenced, but is currently reviving.

The Haida narratives involving the trickster, creation myths and other themes collected and translated here cannot be relegated to a pastime. Storytelling is not simply entertainment, it is identity-constitutive, and can even have a medicinal purpose. The immense difference in paradigms of culture and in evaluating what is and is not "serious" culture, or what is good, respectively, evil, demonstrating why the significance of the trickster cannot easily and directly be translated into anglophone cultures. Bringhurst's texts occasionally allude to a lost context[14] in which such narratives were constitutive of the self-image of the group in which they were performed, hinting at cultural paradigms which allocate narratives and the artworks carrying them great centrality.[15]

The subject of the title tale "The Raven Steals the Light" is a creation myth. The world starts in darkness as an old man keeps all the light in the universe contained in a box at the centre of many other boxes. Raven decides to steal the light for himself and so transforms himself into a hemlock needle which is swallowed by the old man's daughter who subsequently gives birth to a boy

13 The formline drawings add a particular conception of art. Art, in Haida culture, if such a term is appropriate, and storytelling, are integrated into everyday life; they form part of a living memory and an identity, which is always being created and transformed as well as reinvented. Present on totem poles, canoes, hats, masks, coats and many other every day instruments and accoutrements, not even to mention body decorations, formline paintings have (had) a centrality in Haida culture, which can well be compared to the presence of books in many Western cultures. And very many of the narratives revolve around Raven or Eagle, two central trickster figures at the head of the two major lines of clans.

14 Such metatextual comments are especially striking in the story "The Bear Mother and Her Husband", where Bringhurst repeatedly stresses the difference between his narrator's viewpoint and "the old days" (63) or "mythtime" (64), claiming that "the myth tells us" (69) of certain events, casting shadows over others.

15 In this context, Donald Hines' description of Plains Indian culture discussed by Steve Mizrach holds true for the Haida context too: "In order to understand Plains Indians folklore, we have to realize that their myths were not just 'just-so' stories to entertain, divert, or make inadequate efforts at naturalistic explanation. Rather, Indian myth functioned in religious, pedagogical, and initiatory ways, to help socialize young people and illuminate the various religious and other roles in society. Indian myth was always fluid, and grounded in the present, which is what might be expected of societies which largely lacked static, written traditions. Storytelling was an art which was maintained by the medicine people with great fidelity, because it was used to explain the development of certain rituals and elements of society" (Hines 1992). Quoted from http://www2.fiu.edu/~mizrachs/thunderbird-and-trickster.html. Accession on 16 March 2009.

child with a beak and feathers. Having thus secured entry into the old man's house, Raven gradually persuades his "grandfather" to show him the light, and when he does, the Ravenchild transforms into a black shadow, snaps the light in his jaws and flies out of the chimney hole. The light transforms the world and makes Raven visible to his antagonist, Eagle, and this quite literally sparks many further stories.

Even in this précis of a myth of birth and creation, certain elements appear which are relevant in the present discussion of wisdom and stereotyping. Raven is powerful, but not almighty. He has adversaries and characters who do not match his powers yet have secrets or objects he can aspire to. He is deceitful and even malicious in his intents and in his selfish pursuits. He gets involved and mingles with humans, thus confusing any sense of a hierarchy, and the physical transformations which are Raven's specialty. It stresses the dynamic nature of everything in the world and makes the negative aspects of his trickster activities bearable as none of the acts he performs is of eternal duration and he gets his comeuppance in several of the stories. Ultimately unfixed and inviolable, Raven is a creature who is placed above most of the themes and concerns of postcolonial discourse.[16]

Reid's drawing of this story[17] depicts Raven in three different shapes, as embryo, as Ravenchild, sitting on his grandfather's lap and reaching for the box of light and, hovering over everything, as a large bird poised for take-off, triumphantly holding a double-faced sun in his beak. Beside this, the drawing stresses frames and thereby order, attempts at containing and controlling the world. The light, we are told, is contained in a box contained in numerous other boxes, but it is represented as a sun whose rays are cast over the squares representing the boxes. The most striking frame is the old man's hut, represented by five wooden beams surrounding the boxes and the human shapes, but broken by Raven's head which pokes out, echoing the sunlight. Thus Raven literally breaks the frame and generates change and dynamics by "thinking outside the box"—one of the most common principles from which many wisdom aphorisms derive their humorous potential. The fact that Raven unlocks the sunlight and throws the world into brightness underlines this.

[16] A reading that would attempt to get postcolonial mileage out of, for instance, Bringhurst's subtle play with concepts of blackness and darkness, the invasion and theft theme and the inefficacy of the symmetrical boxes would miss the universalism the book stresses in several places (e.g., 1990: 27, 41). At the same time, some of the metatextual comments inserted by Bringhurst allude to colonial history and require readers to keep their minds on distant mythical time and historical conditions simultaneously.

[17] The image is available here: http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/aborig/reid/images/re14_01b.jpg. Accessed on 10 March 2009.

As Claude Lévi-Strauss in his preface points out, the trickster in Bringhurst and Reid is commensurate with an entire world-picture where the boundary between human and other beings is continuously traversed and transgressed:

> No other art has broken thought the barrier between the natural and the supernatural worlds with such momentum. Over the millennia, the Indians of the Northwest Coast have developed graphic and sculptural conventions and employed stylistic devices in which human and nonhuman traits are combined, interwoven and transmuted. They give life to a reality hitherto unimaginable, one to which the viewer is immediately drawn. This reality consists of beings of a third type: neither human nor animal, but both at once. (Lévi-Strauss 1984: 10)

Lévi-Strauss goes on to discuss that despite this remove, the reality described is by no means ahistorical. He identifies the time space circumscribed by the Raven cycle as one of transition from a mythical past to a historical past. This creates a genealogy within which the fallible Raven trickster figures as a mythically heightened ancestor of mankind:

> The first myth in this collection [...] involves the Raven, a deity of the type called in English a trickster, which the old French word décepteur matches to perfection. The fact that the Amerindians placed a deceitful, insolent, libidinous and often grotesque characters with a penchant for scatology in the forefront of their pantheon sometimes surprises people. But indigenous thought places the Raven at the turning point between two eras. In the beginning, nothing was impossible; the most extravagant wishes could come true. However, the present era, in which humans and animals have acquired distinct natures, is stamped with the seal of necessity. In the world inhabited by man, social life obeys rules, and nature dictates its will. We can no longer do just anything. The trickster discovers this, often to his cost. And because his immoderate appetites make him the foremost victim of these nascent constraints, it is up to him to make them definitive and to establish their terms. In a universe that is undergoing constant change, the Raven is both the ultimate rebel and the foremost maker of laws. (Ibid.: 11)

The border-crossing nature of Raven as an extratextual force of creation already emerges in Bringhurst's brief introduction to Haida Gwaii.[18] Having located the islands in space and relation to the colonial practice of mapping, he proceeds to take them out of "the shadow of somebody's national flag" and to overwrite the impact of historical events and personages with myth:

> So the Raven, who often likes to call a rose a skunk cabbage, just to see what trouble he can cause, has tricked us again, Haidas and outsiders alike, with this one. He has us trained now to point to Haida Gwaii and say 'Queen Charlotte Islands'.

18 For a more extensive discussion of the so-called discovery of Haida Gwaii, see Bringhurst (1990: 32–47).

These stories were told there well before Queen Charlotte's time (Reid and Bringhurst 1984: 15).

Not only has Raven stepped out of the story already in this little frame narrative and thereby put all other "outsiders" in their place, but the imperial project of taking possession and marking this by naming is ridiculed: "Haida Gwaii are shown as the westernmost extremity of Canada, and they are named not for the Haida, who have always lived there, nor for the Raven, who somewhat inadvertently put them there, but for a woman who never saw them" (ibid.). In this reading, colonial history is simply one of Raven's trickster schemes and Western readers are invited to submit to an inclusive view of mankind as being equal in their dependence on arbitrary powers. In this context it is revealing to see that Raven is said to have "trained" humans to use certain names as the discourse of plant cultivation skilfully throws colonizing discourses back at the colonizers. Raven is thereby introduced as a *force majeure* not just in the sense of exerting power over human beings; he represents a way of thinking that stresses humour and laughter as strategies of coming to terms with difference and change. A one-dimensional reading would conclude that this posits a reversal of power relationships in that the Haida Raven is revealed as having power over the colonizers. But one-dimensionality, temporal sequence and the exclusionist pretensions of hierarchies are what is ridiculed here and the joke is on the reader who fails to acknowledge that language is a trickster, and so is any narrative.

The narrative shifts between timeless myth-retelling to a metafictional stance which contains topical, even eco-critical, considerations, as for example at the end of a story describing how Raven persuades the Haida people, "the first humans" (Reid and Bringhurst 1984: 34), to venture out of their protective clamshell to play with him and with each other and to develop into prosperous coast dwellers:

> Their descendants built on its beaches the strong, beautiful homes of the Haidas and embellished them with the powerful heraldic carvings that told of the legendary beginnings of great families, all the heroes and heroines and the gallant beasts and monsters who shaped their world and their destinies. For many generations they grew and flourished, built and created, fought and destroyed, living according to the changing seasons and the unchanging rituals of their rich and complex lives.
>
> It's nearly over now. Most of the villages are abandoned, and those which have not entirely vanished lie in ruins. The people who remain are changed. The sea has lost much of its richness, and great areas of the land itself lie in waste. Perhaps it's time the Raven started looking for another clamshell. (Ibid.: 37)[19]

[19] Reid's sculpture depicting this story can be viewed in the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia. As Joel Martineau shows in his "Autoethnography and Material Culture: The Case of Bill Reid", radical change is a concept which has some resonance for Reid who grew up in ignorance of his Haida ancestry. His article also

Not only does this passage create a straightforward link between the heroic narratives carved by the historical Haida people, but it addresses the ambiguity of change itself: not all change is welcome, especially not if it occurs in the form of loss or destruction, and even the Haida ancestors display a tendency to regard their own culture as "unchanging". From the speaker's perspective, this is proved wrong as s/he surveys Haida culture in a state of decline. At the same time, there is potential for a renewal of the story, provided by the creative force represented by the unruly Raven. Raven in this story is not the actual creator of human beings; he finds them, is amused by them and teaches them tricks. In luring them out of their clamshell, he displays a dual nature, a fact which the story highlights by a direct address to the reader:

> So the Raven leaned his great head close to the shell, and with the smooth trickster's tongue that had got him into and out of so many misadventures during his troubled and troublesome existence, he coaxed and cajoled and coerced the little creatures to come out and play in his wonderful, shiny new world. As you know, the Raven speaks in two voices, one harsh and strident, and the other, which he used now, a seductive bell-like croon which seems to come from the depth of the sea, or out of the cave where the winds are born. It is an irresistible sound, one of the loveliest sounds in the world.
>
> ("The Raven and the First Men" 34)

It is no accident, given that this passage deals with creative speaking, that elements of oral narration abound in it, ranging from such rhetorical devices as the alliterating verbs and nouns denoting Raven's voice to a metatextual reminder of performative aspects of the situation in which the telling takes place, inviting the readers/listeners to become aware of their implication in the story's re-enactment.

The Raven myth thus has change at its very centre, an interest in making change comprehensible and bearable. Raven's changes, transmutations and variations keep the theme of change on the page, as it were, repeatedly stressing their universality and inevitability. In this narrative of change, humour and laughter are inevitable and omnipresent elements with a spiritual dimension, and it is part of the process of understanding required of the recipient to give up any rigid notions of superiority, supremacy and even power. The actual explanatory transaction that can be gleaned from this narrative is very much in line with the reversal and dissolution of hierarchies and the challenge of

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invites discussion relating to the status of artistic originality and authorship, concluding, as it does, with a brief outlook on a controversy about Reid's unacknowledged collaborators on his final projects, suggesting that he might have adopted "devious" strategies of creative tricksterdom in his own work, taking his understanding of the creator as trickster to a level contemporary Canadian culture proved to be unprepared to accept. Or further details, see *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* (2001: 242–58).

rigid notions of power one can see at work in recent and current postcolonial writings, both creative and theoretical.

CONCLUSION

> [Raven] met two men whom he knew to be beavers. They were very friendly …
>
> ("The Raven Steals the Salmon from the Beaver's House" 27)

In a sense this essay has experimented with an inclusive logic akin to the one evinced in the epigraph above and displayed in the Raven stories, especially visibly so in Reid's drawings. In Haida formline, "[a]ll design has movement" (Holm 1965: 83), the interlocking parts of the drawings generate "double meaning" (ibid.: 89), "suggesting a very versatile imagination and perhaps a keen sense of humor on the part of the artist (ibid.: 91). The essential ingredients of flexibility and humour are at the heart of the Raven cycle, and I argue, they might progress closer towards the heart of academic discourses.

As outlined above, the transformations alluded to in the title of this essay are not restricted to the plot level of the Raven cycle. From the introductory considerations of wisdom as a concept beyond, yet touching on literary studies, which links the individual with collective and even universal perspectives, this essay has reviewed some changes in pace and method in postcolonial and indigenous discourses. I would like to see these fields and discourses engage in even more adventurous transformations on the level of ideas and modes of telling as well as the project I refer to as creative listening, to include a reminder of orature. As always, when boundaries and categories are challenged, this elicits largely unnecessary fears as to how such flexibility might affect the identity of each discipline. The fictional/mythical example of Raven who always ends up putting his mischievous persona together after numerous scrapes and beatings can function as a model of the humorous reconstruction, especially in his willingness to embrace hybridity and otherness in others. As far as he is concerned, the beings he encounters can either be a beaver or human, or both, as long as they invite him to a decent supper, which they do.

By instigating an approximation between literature and myth, using a liminal text such as the Raven cycle, I have staged an encounter of different themes, forms of discussion and modes of thinking and expression that exposes some of the limiting habits of the disciplines concerned. Perhaps some of the academic exchanges on the border-lines between indigenous and postcolonial studies suffer from too much political correctness and tiptoeing around sensitive issues and too much unctuous seriousness unbalanced by comic and even frivolous games. Some changes in literature, art and discourse happen naturally over time, while other changes and transformations are purposeful and engineered.

An inclusion of some element of trickster humour into discursive exercises would not negate the serious purpose of these developments but adds to them a creative note of flexibility and experimentation. It might even shed light on some previously undisclosed aspects of story-wisdom.

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11

The Ethnopoetics of Irular Ballads

A.CHELLAPERUMAL
Department of Anthropology
AND
SUJATHA VIJAYRAGHAVAN
Department of English, Pondicherry University, India

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section gives an introduction to Irular, the second a summary of the story-line in their songs and the final one a discussion of some of their texts.

The Irulas are among the most ancient and the second largest tribe in India mostly inhabiting the northern and western parts of Tamil Nadu, living in settlements in the mountains and on the foothills in the regions of Nilgiri, Coimbatore, Periyar, Salem and also in the Chengai Anna districts. Irular also live in many parts of south-eastern Karnataka, in the Palghat district of Kerala and southern Andhra Pradesh. The ballads considered here belong to the oratures of the Irular of the subtropical forests and mountain slopes around Coimbatore at a height ranging from 1,000 to 6,500 feet above sea level. They are known by the alternate names of Eralavan, Erukula, Iravan, Irava, Iruligar, Koravar and Kadu Chensu.

The Irula hierarchy is always patriarchal within the family. Outside of it every clan has a *Moopan* (*moopu* literally means old age, here suggesting seniority) or headman who presides over all events. A *Moopan* is always a hereditary office, passed on from father to son, though cases of a younger brother stepping in, in the event of the heir being a child are not unusual. The *Kuruthalai* and *Ilandari* (both names suggest secondary social positions), who are next in position only to the headman, hold the responsibility of preserving intra-communal and inter-communal links between the Irulas. They broadcast and convene events of celebration and sorrow. Both these offices are hereditary. The fourth in the list of the community's position of prominence is that of the *Vandari* who assists the *Moopan*. When the community makes an offering to a temple during annual festivals, it is the *Vandari*'s privilege to carry it upon his head

on behalf of his people. During weddings it is the *Vandar,* who calls out aloud the names of the guests whose money gifts to the wedding couple he lists. The *Mannukaran* or the Soil Man holds a hereditary office and enters the field first and sows the grain. Now in Madakkadu, where these songs were collected, this office lies vacant because the Irulas have no land of their own to cultivate. The Irulas comprise nine clans in all, which were originally created to facilitate exogamous marriage relations.[1] The Irulas hold that they have in all 108 sub-clans which are included in nine large clans: Karathiya, Kuppulika, Cambar, Kurunagar, Peradorae, Vellaga, Aaru moopan, Ezhoorae and Ettarae. Each of these is known as a *kootam* or gathering with any one of these specific names prefixing it, therefore, the *Karathiya kootam, Ezhoorae kootam*, and so on. Every *kootam* has its own intricate sub-divisions. Marriage relations are agreed between one *kootam* and another as established by tradition.[2]

The Irular of these regions are yet to fully benefit from state-sponsored schemes for their upliftment. By and large they make a living working as wage-earning labourers for the land-owners of the neighbouring places, though some also take land on lease from the latter and cultivate it. Another possible means of livelihood is to burn and clear forests and cultivate short-term quick crops such as millet. Every year a piece of land on a hill would be selected. This land is not the personal property of any one of the Irulas. Under the leadership of the headman, the whole tribe would both labour for and share the crop, with

[1] The following table indicates a region-wise settlement of the Irular sub-divisions near Coimbatore:

Region	*Irular sub-division*
i. Seengapati	Peradorae (In reserve forest area)
ii. Madakkadu	Karattiyar, Cambar, Peradorae and Vellaga
iii. Pachaan Vayal	Peradorae, Vellaga and Cambar
iv. Karumbukkadu	Karattiyar and Cambar
v. Puduvedu Mulangadu	Karattiyar and Cambaar
vi. Thanikandi	Vellaga, Karattiyar and Cambar
vii. Vellapatu	Cambar and Kuppulika
viii. Chadivayal	Karattiyar, Peradorae, Cambar and Vellaga
ix. Pottapatu	Cambar and Peradorae
x. Sarkar Porattu	Karattiyar and Cambar
xi. Porattu	Cambar and Karattiyar

[2] The following table shows the marital links of the Irular clans:

Name of the Kootam	*Marriage ties with*
i. Karathiya	Cambar and Kuppulika
ii. Kuppulika	Kurunnaga
iii. Cambar	Karathiya and Kurunaga
iv. Kununaga	Karathiya and Kuppulika
v. Peratora	Karathiya
vi. Vellaga	Karathiya
vii. Aarumoopam	Karathiya

the headman also acting as arbitrators if two or more settlements wanted the same piece of land. In the five ballads collected for this study, there is repeated mention of the *Moopan* and his wife going along with his people to clear the forest for cultivation. In each of these instances, the wife is anxious about leaving behind her girlchild but the tradition of the headman and his wife participating in all the activites of the clan and the *Moopan*'s recognition of his responsibility to his people over and above his familial interests prevail over her protests. It is in their absence that each event of sexual exploitation of the girl takes place in these songs. Small cattle and fowl are reared by the Irular in the settlements and supplement their income. Cultivation on the mountain slopes is always endangered by invading herds of elephants that are tempted by ripe grain. In all tasks involved in cultivation both men and women participate, though the more strenuous tasks such as threshing are done by the men. Although bonded labour has been constitutionally abolished, poverty and endless debts still keep several members of the community in near servitude, almost throughout their lives. *Pannaiyam* (from *pannai* or farm) refers to stay-in labourers, who live in estates with their families and work there at least for a year at a stretch.

Esoteric principles inform the structure of the design of their house and the positioning of the doorways. The house generally has two or three compartments and the partially covered pyols in and around the house are coated with cow dung above their clay finish. The construction of the house is done by the members of the family, though others from neighbouring households also help. The Irulas define the four corners of the house as *Agnimoolai* or The Fire Corner of the south-west, *Chalamoolai* or The Water Corner of the north-west, *Kannimoolai* or The Virgin Corner of the north-east and *Yamamoolai* or The Corner of the God of Death. Coir and fibre are used in construction along with wood. A wide variety of fresh greens is included in the Irula's diet with hand-pounded rice. The Irulas divide the year into two large units, which are known as *Adi Parvam* and *Vesa Parvam*. The predominant deities of the Irulas are *Chaadiamman*, a goddess to whom a temple is dedicated on the way to Kalkutthi Mountain and after whom the region is known as Chadivayil; *Neeliamman* in Madakkadu after whom the Neeli canal is named and *Vellingiriandavar* of Vellingiri which is close to the second place mentioned.

The Irula language is a southern Dravidian language predominated by Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada or Telugu depending upon the region inhabited. In Tamil it is classified as one of the seven Tamil variations.[3] The Irular orature like their

[3] Dravidian (73)> Southern (34) > Tamil-Kannada (28)> Tamil-Kodagu (24)> Tamil-Malayalam (17)> Tamil (7)> Irula, Kaikadi, Kurumba Betta, Muthuvan, Sholaga, Tamil, Yerukula.

For a visual map of the linguistic lineage for Iruliga, see http://www.ethnologue.com. Also see Gordon (2005). For the online version, you may visit http://www.ethnologue.com/

civilization is rich and unique. All orature of the Irular, in which songs and tales abound, is in Iruliga. Though they are bilingual and fluent in Tamil, they largely speak in Iruliga amongst themselves. Bilingual proficiency in second language Tamil is not necessarily accompanied by literacy. Iruliga follows the grammar of narrative Tamil (SOV, postpositions, non-tonal.), but words are invariably shortened in pronunciation. Much of the semantic field is recognizable to the Tamil native speaker. However there are several words which are unique to the language and need clarification from the Irular. Although it is accorded the status of a language, not much attention has been paid to its rich oral heritage. Kamil V. Zvelebil's study of Irula riddles is a pioneering and rare example.[4]

The Irular language is also known as Irular Mozhi (which means language of the Irular), or as Iruliga, or most often as Irula. The Irular are peasants, small-scale agriculturalists, coffee- and tea-plantation labourers. The term Irula or Irular (denoting the plural) means according to them "those that have lived from the beginning". Most of their important rituals are conducted at night and therefore once again in their perception, the relevance of the term "Irul" (*Irul* meaning darkness in Tamil). By extension of the same meaning, Irular have lived from the beginnings of creation, when light and life first began. The five ballads studied in this chapter are in circulation among the Irulas living in the eastern end of the western mountain ranges around Coimbatore. In the Coimbatore district they are found in Velliangiri, Siruvani, Marudamalai and Attipattu. The forest ranges inhabited by them include Singapathi, Chayavadil, Vellapathu, Poratthi, Sarkar Poratthi and Thanikandi. The settlements outside the forest include Madakkadu, Mullangkadu, Puduveedu, Pattiviran Kovilpatti, Pachaan Vayil, Karumbu Kaatupati and Muthattu Vayil. The concept suggested by the term "ethnopoetics" is clearly a postcolonial insight that recognized the need to decentre Western literary theories and poetics in the study of non-Western literatures. This chapter on Irular ballads suggests a similar re-examination of what constitutes notions of literature and its poetics in a country where thousands of languages and dialects are spoken and are rich in orature.[5]

II

There are at least seven ballads commonly known now among the Irulas (of the original eleven). They are:

- *Jogi Nandamma katha*

[4] For details, see Zvelebil (Year of publication, page numbers); In Honour of Thomas Burrow. (1979): 361–368. The full article is available on the web. http://www.jstor.org/view/0041977x/ap020092/02a00180/0.

[5] See visual maps of language and dialect distribution hosted by Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore at their site:http://www.ciil.org/Main/Languages/index.htm.

- *Yeladumban katha*
- *Thulasilamma katha*[6]
- *Thundu Malli katha*
- *Liamen katha*
- *AmbaVallaiyan katha* and
- *Kovae Konaee Kovaedode katha*

Of these, the first five are considered here because they were readily in circulation and easily accessible. These ballads are the unique literary treasure of the Irulas and are not to be found among any other hill tribes apart from the Irulas, although their other folk-songs and tales are found in other communities and regions outside of their own with some variations. The ballads are referred to by the name of the central character by the Irular themselves, though not in the way print-texts have defined labels of reference. The singers would refer to them as "the story of Jogi Nandamma", for instance. The five ballads are hence entitled the ballads of "Jogi Nandamma", "Yeladumban", "Thulasilamma", "Thundu Malli" and "Liamen" respectively for the present study. These ballads do not have any written text corresponding to them and are oral, aural and visual since they are part of a larger tradition of performance. There is no conceptual, literary space for art as independent and apart from the ordinary event of life for the Irular. The performance as such does not take place as an event by itself on a specific occasion but is always part of a larger communal activity. This may be alongside the activities in the household or in the fields, and is most often performed by women when they work in the forests and fields. However, since the songs are the common inheritance of the entire tribe, every member of the community could be the performer, participant and audience. Events of life in the settlement form the substance of these songs.

The following presents a brief story-line for each of the five ballads.

"The Ballad of Jogi Nandamma"

The headman Kuniyamoopan and his wife have six sons, of whom five are married. They long to have a daughter. Performing several austerities, they appease the forest goddess Veeramachi who blesses them with a lovely girlchild. Born of divine intervention, the child is very dear to them and her arrival is celebrated with great fanfare. One day, the people of their settlement approach the headman and insist that they go and clear a patch of the forest so that it can be cultivated. The headman's wife is reluctant to leave behind the little girl, who is barely ten years old, and pleads with her husband to postpone the event. Putting the needs of his community before his wife's hesitation, he decides to

6 The third ballad "Thulasiamma" is also known as the "Koda Valliyan" song. Kovanoopan in the ballad is the son of an elder of the "Kodavalliyar" community of a village called Kodoor, and so this reference.

go. He is also firm that his wife accompanies him and helps him in clearing the forest as is the community custom. The mother assures their daughter that they will be away only for the count of a single sunset. She cautions her daughter not to go beyond a boundary-line that she draws outside their hut. Soon after, they leave with the rest of the community, taking flint stone and silk cotton with them to burn down the bush. The five daughters-in-law send the girl to graze the cattle. The child is obliged to cross the line drawn by the mother. She is thirsty and asks her sisters- in-law to give her some water from the pots they have filled in the river. They refuse on the pretext that if the level of the water went down, it would splash on the way. The sixth son who passes by takes the little girl's hand and leads her into the river for a drink. What follows is not elaborated, but is suggested that the child has been incestuously attacked by her brother and raped. The ballad concludes that the girl resolved not to come out of the waters and becomes a fish. The parents return and the song notes in veiled terms that the son is chastised by his parents. Jogi Nandamma becomes a part of the eternal waters. The goat and cows, which were born when the girl was born, also transform to become a deer.

"The Ballad of Yeladumban"

Yeladumban is a young man who has been married not very long ago. His young wife is in the sixth month of pregnancy when he has to go to the Yela mountains to fetch the mythical pearl that can be found there. He is unhappy to leave his wife behind, but his mother wants the pearl. He tells his mother repeatedly not to give the girl difficult chores, such as fetching huge pots of water from the river, to do and advises his wife to stay close to his two sisters. After Yeladumban goes away, the girl's mother-in-law bids her daughters take a small pot each and give a big one to the pregnant girl. The three girls go up and down from their hut to the river and back before the huge containers at home are filled to the mother-in-law's satisfaction. Then the mother-in-law tells her daughter-in-law to cook gruel and sauce for the family. The girl is very tired, but she cleans and grinds the grain and cooks a meal for the family. Meanwhile, the mother-in-law, who had managed to obtain a female cobra, keeps it hidden in a pot of water and covers it with some leaves to prevent it from being seen. As the exhauasted girl lies down to rest near the grinding stone, the mother-in-law cooks the snake and serves it to the girl with some rice. When the girl complains of giddiness and asks the older woman what is being served to her, the woman replies that it is meat brought home by the father-in-law. The girl dies of poisoning. When Yeladumban returns home he finds his three sisters and parents, but not his wife. So he questions them and, not satisfied with the reply that she may be visiting a neighbour, he runs about wildly in search of her. In the vegetable patch which he had cultivated lovingly, he finds a long and beautiful strand of hair which he recognizes as that of his wife. When he digs

the fresh earth, he finds his young wife's body. Enraged, he hacks his parents and sisters to death. Burying his wife once more, he plants an arrow where he thinks her heart would be and flinging himself upon it, kills himself, not wanting to live in a world where his beloved wife is no longer alive.

"The Ballad of Thulasilamma"

The mother of a young man asks her son what kind of a bride he wants. She suggests a number of possible places where the bride could be found but the son disapproves of every town. He sets out to go around the world himself. He travels widely, but does not find a bride to his liking. Finally, by the riverside of a small village he espies a beautiful girl and her blind sister bathing. He steals their clothes and when they ask for them after bathing he returns them telling the beautiful girl, whose name, he discovers is Thulasilamma, that on the forthcoming Wednesday he would come with his parents in pomp and ceremony and wed her. He tells her also to keep a fast for three days, refusing food and drink so that their steadfastness in love is made known to all. He also assures her that he too would fast in the same manner till they meet on their wedding day. On the appointed day, the groom arrives in a fanfare riding an elephant, but the blind girl is dressed and brought before him. The young man notices the deception and demands that the right girl is brought to wed him. The wedding takes place and the happy young couple returns to the young man's village. Immediately thereafter his parents send him away to fetch wild honey from the forest. The young man is unhappy to be separated from his bride barely three days after the wedding. However, his parents are insistent, because it is to be given as an offering to their chief. Therefore, in spite of many ill omens the young man goes to collect honey. Meanwhile, his father calls the girl and lies down on her lap. The ballad does not describe the manner in which the father-in-law takes advantage of his position as the head of the family, and has an incestuous relationship with his daughter-in-law. It is only suggested, as in the other songs. The daughter-in-law asks her mother-in-law which of the two of them would be the first to slay the father-in-law, to which the latter replies that the wronged girl may take her turn first. Later when the son returns, he beats his chest and laments his misfortune. After this he enters the river inviting his wife and mother to join him if they are innocent. The three of them become statues, with the son standing in the middle and the wife on the left and the mother on the right.

"The Ballad of Thundu Malli"

Kavamoopan, the tribal chief, had six sons and one daughter. One day the chief and his wife leave with the people of seven villages to clear and cultivate the forests. The six brothers and their wives, who live as one large extended family, get the girl married to an orphan. Some time later, the six brothers decide to

go hunting. They want the sister's husband to accompany them, because he is a skilled hunter and his dog is an excellent helper. His young wife has just given birth to a baby girl and he is unwilling to leave his family. Nor is his wife willing, for she is still lying and is not able to fetch water herself. But the brothers persuade the couple and the young man leaves with his dog. The hunters track a wild boar and when it goes into hiding in a hole they smoke it and send the young brother-in-law inside it to fetch the animal. After they haul up two wild boars, they roll a huge stone into the mouth of the hole leaving the young man inside as he cries out for help. The brothers roast the animal and slicing two portions of meat, tie them around the dog's neck with the young man's head cloth and chase it away. The dog runs back home to the young mother with the share of meat sent to her and barks frantically. Picking up the new-born, the girl follows their dog which takes her to the mouth of the sealed pit. The brothers feign ignorance about her missing husband.

Meanwhile, the young man goes deeper into the pit and finally reaches the kingdom of the netherworld, whose inhabitants look strange to him and who are cannibals. He is taken to their king, whom the young man hesitates to face, because he is only partially covered. The king takes off his head cloth and gives it to the young man and assures him that he need not fear and that his people will not harm him. The young man introduces himself as an orphan and describes his plight. The king gives the visitor a bag full of all varieties of grain to sow and reap. The young man returns to the mouth of the pit where his wife is crying piteously and the dog is pawing and digging around the stone that seals its opening. The young man kicks the stone from inside and it falls away. They hug each other and vow to leave the place. Crossing the forest and moving to a distant place, they clear the bush and trees by burning it. The ash that comes from this rises waist high and nourishes the land. In the course of time the crop that grows is so abundant that its owners find it difficult to take it home, for no sooner is one load taken than another comes up in the fields. So they look for labourers who would help them carry and store the grain. Driven by famine, starving and wearing only a loin cloth the brothers arrive there with their wives and children. They work for their brother-in-law not knowing that he is their employer, though the latter stands upon a high mound and points out the scene to his wife. When the harvesting is completed, the young couple treats all their workers to a rich feast after which cloth and money is given to them. When the brothers come up, the sister falls at their feet seeking pardon for putting them to work. The brothers confess and finally they all live together happily. "Thundu Malli" which is the name of the girl literally means "Little Jasmine" and is also a term of endearment for the youngest of the children and the only daughter. Her name suggests how dear she was to her parents.

"The Ballad of Liamen"

The word "Liamen" in Iruliga means paternal uncle, i.e. father's younger brother. The headman and his wife go with the rest of their people to clear the forest and cultivate it; the young daughter who is menstruating is left alone at home. Despite the girl saying that she is forbidden to enter the kitchen for some days, she is told to serve the rice left on the ledge if her uncle comes home. The uncle comes and demands hot food, So she cooks rice and meat. After the two of them eat, the uncle bids her to fetch the *karakandi*[7] nut and plays with her, following which he has sexual union with the girl. While he prepares to leave the girl tells him that on the next day he would hear the drums that are beaten in a death house. Left alone, the girl spreads her long hair, decorates herself and then puts an end to her life, after locking the seven doors of their house. When her parents return they question the old woman minding the hens. She replies that she saw the girl's uncle visit the house. The uncle is summoned. Guessing what may follow, he wears his wedding shirt and takes leave of his wife. On the way he hears the drums beaten for the dead. When he arrives at his elder brother's place, he bends over the body of his niece and laments her passing away and the men scythe him to death. The two are buried side by side; on her grave grows the banana, and on his the bitter berry.

III

There is no term in Iruliga for ballad[8] as distinguished from the tale for both are denoted by the word "katha". The term "ballad" borrowed from Western poetics could be used here only as a descriptive one and it does not imply that these songs of the Irular in any way resemble ballads in Western oral and literary tradition, nor is such a comparison the intention of this chapter. These songs contain certain recognizable features such as the legend of a man or woman as the thematic element, the inclusion of a choric refrain and the presence of a moral, implied as it is in each of these songs. Highly repetitious and lengthy and strung together by a series of episodes, these songs embody a social and individual model for the community. In this sense they are also the epics of the Irular. The Irular refer to every tale as a *katha* irrespective of the fact that it is sung and not narrated. These generic critical terms being impositions from outside, the outside researcher is unable to recognize the difference; his or her listening and an attempt to give form and meaning to the "katha" may be largely influenced by attention to the text outside the context of a performance. This is not the case for the Irular, for whom the narrative

7 A wild nut used in a play.

8 The Tamil word for "folklore" as "*nattupurviyal*" was a deliberate academic production of the 1980s, necessitated by researchers in a context where the dividing line between high art and the low blur in day to day life.

poetics of the song follows a varied range of semiotic signs such as words sung, gestures, co-option of audience participation through refrains (the singer/performer is not different or distinguishable from the audience), one member of the community taking the lead role after some time (halfway through a performance one singer may replace another) and thus changing the style, the relationship between the individual singer and the participating group and the moment of performance that pressures the song into emergence. While we look at Irular orature as literary constructs in an academic framework, to the Irular themselves it is part of their life, not something apart from it. The gap and tensions between the performance of the oral/aural text and its transcription and translation exerts considerable influence not only on the text which we are able to access but even on our understanding of what consists of both words as well as paralinguistic tools in performance. A research context such as this is an academic space rather than a part of the life of those whose songs are being considered. This distancing brought about by translation as well as from the performance context redefines the Irula ballad, which is the cultural and social disposition of its community. This sharp divide that the academic perspective causes has to be acknowledged as an intermediary, informing element in our appreciation of these ballads within the realm of their aesthetics, for we are retrieving them only partially, converting a community's participation in the definition of itself into a complex semiotic that is overlaid with its sense of history and social vision. The materialization of these songs through recording and the written form gives them autonomy and this very aspect deprives them of their total identity. Academic appropriation that undermines this complexity could also prompt predeterminations of our perception. Hence the totality of meaning as an effect of performance is limited here.

As past social experiences, Irula ballads always go backward in time to evoke those figures that made their social and domestic history possible. They are in a significant sense their history, because they point to what the Irular construct of themselves and in that sense they lay the foundation for education. Self-contained and limited to a specific geographical field, protected in what till recently was a dense range of hills, the Irulas have lived in remarkable peace. They have no history of war, conquest and expansion. None of the ballads collected refer to enmity between the various clans within the Irular, nor to warfare over possession of forest resources. Nor is there any reference to either the beasts of the forest or natural phenomena like rivers or rain as forces to be contested with for survival. Boundaries of the regions fixed by tradition for the habitation of the various clans are strictly honoured. Irular do not feature in documented official histories of the regions where they live, though they have sustained the forest resources, developed indigenous systems of medicine and farming of short-term crops in mountainous regions and today form the largest resource of agricultural labour in the estates surrounding their region,

especially on the western side. Irular ballads are poetic expressions of the way the Irulas archive their people and their system of values, which is why, like all oral literature, these have endured through time. These ballads lead one to see the ways of thinking as they are expressed in the stories that they poeticize. They not only suggest the cultural sensitivities, but also the social discourses that circulate in their communities. Both self-identity and a sense of community are suggested by these ballads.

A member of the Irula tribe leading the singing with others following him or her is actually organizing a community event where each member is recalling a common ancestor of their tribe whose fate and life was unusual, instructive and which continues to be part of their present time and their lives. This sense of familiarity that the performers share with the characters of the ballad is crucial to the social significance of a literary text which is not available to the outsider/researcher. Ontologically prior meanings of these songs exist; they arise from the earlier performance/participation of the community member who then reproduces them a countless times. The outsider/researcher has to arrive at the meaning via the performance and the various signs; not so the Irular themselves. Orally transmitted and lengthy, these ballads move beyond the linguistic elements to the totality of performance and participation. Memory and the perception of meaning of the texts in each performance shift towards communal myth and self-construction. In the dramatic events of the killing of the incestuous father-in-law, or of the wicked mother-in-law and his two sisters by the husband of the victim, lies the unsaid but explicit, the manner in which the community forges its patterns of domestic relations and social institutions. For the Irular, to sing one of their ballads is to comment on their family, or a life situation, or to discourse upon an intimate relationship or to evoke a sense of their communal history and tradition. Irular ballads come into specific realization every time they are sung. They are documents on human relationships. Seen thus, the performance of these ballads is a moment of self-perception and a revitalization of the ongoing process of individual and communal growth. To see the text as a verbal sign is to limit it to its production at a moment of time. The dimension of '*time-space*' in which the performer/participant accesses the text as shared communal memory and continuity of the event recounted in the text and the way in which the outsider/researcher does so are therefore vastly unlike each other. Every ballad could have many versions as it is sung with slight modifications. Preserved in the memory of its users every performance is innovative. Yet each ballad adopts an essential formal structure that has been refined over time, which is not essentially altered in repetition and with which no liberties are taken.

Repetition and simplicity characterize the Irula ballads facilitating easy memory and retrieval, almost as if the participants allow their minds to ruminate upon what is being sung. The songs are so simple that by participating

through repetition the community learns them without effort and thus keeps it alive. In a song which is succinct in detail and lengthy only by repetition, every syllable is meaningful. The nature of the text demands a structure that is mnemonic, making the songs oral store-houses, locating the characters as part of their community and as part of themselves. This immediacy interplays with the rest of their life and culture as an intertextuality extending into what constitutes culture for the Irular. The actions distantly placed and performed by a third/unknown person nevertheless relate closely to each and every member who recalls them as if they were actions he could possibly perform himself or herself. Though replete with imagination, analogy and surprising reversals, the language used in these songs is no different from that used by the Irular in daily speech. Phonetic, rhythmic, alliterative richness, cadences and repetitions, have a prosodic character which is totally reliant on the common fund of the language tools of the community. For the successful production of the text the community has to participate, with each individual joining in to a greater or lesser extent. As in all oral performances, the notion of artistic originality is valid in terms of how a lead singer and his or her participants carry the song forward collectively.

The structure of these ballads is also indicative of the Irular conception of narrative poetics. Alterations and modifications are thus restricted to the point of emphasis through pronunciation or the number of times certain lines may be repeated to highlight what the words imply at that point of the text. There is no hard and fast rule as to how often a line can be repeated, which part of the song is to be emphasized and which is to be shortened. As such the poetic and stylistic conventions that govern written literature do not prompt those who sing it and participate in its performance. Consider the following lines from "The Ballad of Thundu Malli".

With you *thundu mallige*
With you I cannot come! *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

I must certainly go to clear the forest! *thundu mallige*
You may go and return! *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

Not consenting to the chieftain's words, *thundu mallige*
Our folk we too ask of you. *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

The six sons together, *thundu mallige*
Together did they live. *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

To the orphan boy *thundu mallige*
How can we give the girl child, *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

Neither mother nor father has he *thundu mallige*
That orphan boy, to him? *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

The six brothers-in-law together. *thundu mallige*
He brings in firewood for them, *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

Attending to all the work *thundu mallige*
He toils hard. *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

Our sister! *thundu mallige*
Let him do all the work, *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

To the orphan boy, *thundu mallige*
We must make a living possible. *thundu mallige*

Thundude thundude thundu mallige
Thundude thundude thundu mallige

"The Ballad of Thundu Malli"[9]

[9] So too in Tamil the word for "folklore" as "nattupurviyal" was a deliberate academic production of the 1980s, necessitated by researchers in a context where the dividing line between high art and the low blur in day-to-day life.

The conversation between the chieftain urging his wife to go with him and her reluctance to leave her girlchild behind, followed by the tribe's request to her, which is in turn followed by the decision of the six brothers to give their sister in marriage to the orphan boy after a brief hesitation, the information that they all live together, that the sister's husband does all the chores and the justification that the brothers device are furnished in quick succession. Omissions are only apparent; compression of detail and the assumption of the participant's knowledge mark all the ballads as pervasive features. The headman and his wife feel honour-bound to go with the rest of the tribe to clear the forest for cultivation when the people of the seven villages gather and appeal to their chief to go along with them. Although the wife of the *Moopan* is worried about leaving behind the little daughter, her choice indicates a firm social hierarchy with the male in a dominant position although this would mean a long absence of several months from home. Besides, at no cost is tradition violated in the society that these ballads envision.

Subtlety of expression and a suggestive quality gives these songs a remarkable sophistication and economy that prevents the central event from evoking any hyperbolic embellishment. These ballads consistently give more textual space for introductory details or for descriptions of physical appearance, whereas the high point of action in the song such as the seduction of the girl, the killing of the villain by the tribe's elders or the rejection of life in the world and departure of the characters into water or death are quickly passed over, as if it were an inevitable natural sequence to the choice made by the wrong-doer earlier. Important events are implicit, never described and usually only the onset of the culminating event is suggested. In "The Ballad of Yeladumban", the husband after finding the body of his murdered wife buried in the vegetable patch, re-enters the house, kills his family and returning to his wife's grave, laments his loss before killing himself to reunite with her in death, with the events speeding to a finish:

Then coming running	*O Yeladumba*
Then looked he about.	*O Yeladumba*
While looking for her,	*O Yeladumba*
They looked with the eyes of a thief.	*O Yeladumba*
Such was his anger,	*O Yeladumba*
Then each one of them,	*O Yeladumba*
Taking the arrow he aimed,	*O Yeladumba*
He split them into two.	*O Yeladumba*
In the four corners,	*O Yeladumba*
He hung green festoons.	*O Yeladumba*
Then he came running,	*O Yeladumba*
Brinjal patch, chilly patch,	*O Yeladumba*
'You are born of a swan	*O Yeladumba*
With a face of an infant!'	*O Yeladumba*

Falling down,	*O Yeladumba*
Saying this, he hugged her and cried.	*O Yeladumba*
He covered the pit with soil,	*O Yeladumba*
On the chest above the pit an arrow planted,	*O Yeladumba*
Above the pit an arrow planted.	*O Yeladumba*
'What shall I do staying here!'	*O Yeladumba*
He fell upon the arrow.	*O Yeladumba*
The story ends.	*O Yeladumba*

Elaboration, when it happens, is invariably by repetition. Repeated utterances not only leave a strong impression on the hearer and facilitate recollection, but also, by constantly foregrounding one character, compels the singer/participant to return to the event he or she performs and the entirety of its ramifications. So in "The Ballad of Thulasilamma" too tempo is built up in the opening section that catalogues the various towns and villages in all the four directions, from where the mother offers to find a bride for her son:

From which town do you want a bride O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
A girl from Muttattuvayil O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
From which town do you want a bride O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
A girl from Chemmedu O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
A girl from Patti O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Not at all O mother	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
A girl from Poondi O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Not even from there O mother	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
From which town do you want a bride O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
A girl from Madakkadu O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Not even from there O mother	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
From which town do you want a bride O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
A girl from the forest O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Not even from there O mother	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
A girl from Alandurai O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
A girl from Pudupatti O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
From which town do you want a bride O son	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Not even from there O mother	*Tholachilama Tholachi*

This pattern emphasizes expectation when the hero sets out to find a bride for himself and contrasts with the final tragedy when the father-in-law assaults his son's bride, which in turn pushes the son, his wife and his mother out of the boundaries of life into the waters. So too "Liamen", the word by which the younger brother of one's father is addressed, used in the ballad of the same title as the refrain, would by this repetition draw attention to the community's judgement on the act of incest. In this ballad the name of the girl is not given. Liamen is the central character and the mention of his name as the refrain gradually becomes a metonym of incest. These ballads bear the testimony of Irular laws, customs, beliefs, food, habits, hunting practices, dress, home-life,

marriage, taboo, agriculture, social bonds, law and justice and, in short, all that connects them to their vision of what life constitutes. They echo their ethos and connect the Irular, integrating them, functioning as a powerful vehicle of communication. Therefore, it is equally significant to view these songs as a primary communicative aspect of their life. Aesthetics, world view and conceptions of domestic and social relationships coalesce in these ballads. They legitimize what their inheritors value and what they disavow. This gives a pervasive sense of community, with the performance gaining an archival function.

The recurrent definition of what constitutes correct sexual behaviour, domestic hierarchy and familial relations informs the themes throughout these five ballad-songs making it necessary for certain events to recur in the ballads. These actions include the presence of a young girl-daughter or bride in the midst of hostile brothers or sisters-in-law; the lengthy absence of her parents or husband from home for the sake of the tribe; the girl's forced exit to the world outside; or the aggressive entry of the villain into the seclusion of the house. The rivalry is within the boundaries of domesticity and the woman's body and life form the bone of contention, either for sexual appropriation or for exercising the power to take away her life. Of these "Jogi Nandamma", "Thulasilamma" and "Liamen" pivot around the central event of incest; in "Yeladumban" a wicked mother-in-law, with the help of her family, kills her pregnant daughter-in-law when her son is away from home to collect honey that is to be given to a chieftain. In "Thundu Malli" the six elder brothers of the girl bury her young husband alive when he enters a pit while boar-hunting by closing it with a stone. It is only in the last ballad that no death occurs. Irula ballads are conceived in a language that is sparse, where much is implied and not overtly expressed.

A return to a world of harmony against opposition to and the violation of its rules marks all the ballads. In "Jogi Nandamma", the girlchild is the fruit of long and arduous penance and is brought up in the protective care of the parents within the boundaries of the domestic settlement. As such both the villainy of the outsider is unfamiliar to her as is the world of phenomena outside. At the end of the song, which is quite long, the five sisters-in-law, the wives of the five elder brothers, help the child to scrub herself and bathe in the river after the incestuous exploitation by the brother. Following this incident, once again worshipping their forest goddess Veeramachi, who was invoked by her when she left the house earlier, the child enters the water and vows not to come out of it. As happens in the other songs there is no elaboration at the end of the text upon "Jogi Nandamma's" later fate. In the concluding lines quoted below it is said that she became a fish:

God she worshipped *Joi Nandamma*
Veeramachi mother she saluted *Joi Nandamma*

Jogide Jogide Joi Nandamma
Jogide Jogide Joi Nandamma

Half an hour one hour *Joi Nandamma*
From the water I will not come *Joi Nandamma*

Jogide Jogide Joi Nandamma
Jogide Jogide Joi Nandamma

After that *Joi Nandamma*
Ten of you watch me *Joi Nandamma*

Jogide Jogide Joi Nandamma
Jogide Jogide Joi Nandamma

A fish did she become *Joi Nandamma*
Cursed the parents the brother *Joi Nandamma*

("The Ballad of Jogi Nandamma")

The Irular belief is that the child changed into a fish and her cattle into deer. Nothing more is given in explanation. The divine origins of the child are extended to the concluding moment for this reading. But earlier in the song the innocence and helplessness of the human child is elaborated. Thus, it also calls for a possible though subverted reading that the child was in fact given to the fish, thrown into the river, left to the crocodiles and other big "fish" by the sisters-in-law, who are her sole companions and who protect themselves from the rage of the parents of the girl by attributing the choice to the girl. This falls in line with their cruelty in driving her out to graze the cattle and in refusing the thirsty child a drink. This stand robs the girl of her divinity and humanizes her, as well as being the outsider's readings of a given text outside the sphere of the Irular belief. Possibilities of alternate reading happen when the text is subjected to close structural analysis. This is a fruitful instance that shows the way a text that is sustained within the cultural and social values of a people could become a set of linguistic signs viewed by the listener/reader/interpreter, and causing it to take on a new dimension altogether. Irular ballads are an extension of the community's nourishment through faith in the word handed down. Hence such reading possibilities negate the very ethos of the texts under scrutiny. Meaning in these ballads is, therefore, not produced according to a disembodied system of denotation, expressed in formal norms, but rather from the full range of contents the words transmit in terms of norms by specific users, in specific settings, for specific purposes and, as illustrated here, in pre-existing contexts. In either of the two readings, however, the girl moves

out of the human realm where unnatural events take place, into the world of nature and harmony where the natural laws are respected. "Jogi Nandamma", which portrays the innocence of childhood wronged, is also in one sense a song of origin. Its narrative of the mythical birth of Nandamma, with which the ballads starts, is revoked with her mysterious and mythical absorption into the waters, the latter action dramatizing the corruption of creation elaborated earlier. In this ballad, the final line refers to the punishment which is always strictly and dispassionately—for no elaborate lament marks the reaction of the elders of the community—administered is suggested in the word "cursed". Physical relationships are monitored by unspoken moral relationships. The relationships that are disrupted in these songs are those that contain the family and society.

Birth, death and the sexual event are recurrent in all the ballads. Two realms are seen in the ballads: the realistic and the magical. Next to a real event is a moment of divinization. Events take place in a shared communal memory becoming part of both history and myth at the same time. So it is never a "Once upon a time" event such as in a tale. The ballads evoke deep feelings because they are located immediately in recognizable locales and not in a far away place.[10] There is a perception of unity in all aspects of civilization and one is cautioned to keep this in mind. This unity is continually created by choice and action, in the past event and its present rendition for all constituents of this unity belong to the past as well as to the present. So the ballads which recount events are also simultaneously self-expressions, quasi-biographical and quasi-mythical, commenting upon the dangers that challenge domestic and social continuance and creation.

In "Thulasilamma", after the young groom leaves the house to collect wild honey the incestuous father-in-law calls out to his wife to send his younger wife—by which he means his son's wife—to him, and in euphemistic terms the song states that the man told the girl to give him her thigh because he wanted to lie down and rest. Like her counterpart in "Jogi Nandamma", Thulasilamma also enters this world and the text after much waiting, searching and overcoming of obstacles. The hero is attracted to her even before he meets her when he espies a very long strand of beautiful hair and he vows that if it belonged to a man, then the man would be his sister's groom and if it belonged to a girl, then she would be his wife. The absence of a suitable bride in all the four directions, the mythical journey on a horse, the finding of the strand of hair, Thulasilamma and her blind sister bathing in the river, the young man hiding their garments

[10] The compilation of the ballads from the Irular community was done by A. Chellaperumal as part of his UGC project between 2002–5 and inscribed by him. The research and writing of this chapter was done by Sujatha Vijayaraghavan. The English translations of all the ballads referred to herein are from her unpublished translation into English of the five ballads. Hence both names are given as authors.

to see the girl at close quarters and talk to her, the meeting when the couple make vows to one another, the groom's arrival on the appointed day with a large retinue, the momentary hope of the parents in sending the blind girl as the bride, the defeat of their plans and finally the wedding, which is followed by the young groom's plea to his mother that even the flower canopy put up for his wedding has not withered, when she urges him to set out to gather wild honey—all together build up a magic that is broken in the final moment when the son is betrayed, the girl exploited and all the foregoing events slighted by the father. The sequence of events and the harshness of the violent reversal, a pattern shared by all the ballads, places the events and characters both in the real and the mythical simultaneously, never valorizing one over the other. All human actions here are causal, not random. They are good or bad and lead to the after-life or death, the nature of both being determined by the choices and actions made by the victim or the members of the tribe. What follows is also driven by human will, not by divine intervention or by a higher power of fate. The passage from life to deathlessness is clearly indicated as made possible by the innate greatness of the character, the greatness of the suffering and the rejection of life or its withdrawal where virtue is disregarded. These ballads which are oral/aural/verbal systems that order people's lives are also systems of thought and philosophy, that flow into their lives almost imperceptibly when the community works together. The songs depict the reality of Irular lives and the beliefs that inform them. For instance, in the closing part of "Thulasilamma", whose name alone is mentioned in this text, her young husband and the mother-in-law enter the river and become statues. The metamorphosis from the human to a statue is a passage into becoming a lasting witness of the event that causes this change in the first place. It is also simultaneously the passage into a kind of holiness, to a state beyond the human extent of life bound by time. This change happens naturally without any evidence of an effort on the part of the persons who experience it. It is also at the same time an unresisting acceptance on the part of the natural phenomenon of the entrants whether it is water or stone. The moment of transition itself is mentioned almost in the passing and very briefly as if it were a minor event and not as the final climactic moment dramatized in a song.

In water that was as deep as an elephant,	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Water just reaching up to the hips,	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
With water just reaching up to the hips,	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Beating on his chest and crying	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Turning into stone, turning into mud,	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
As for the son he went with god.	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
'If there is fear you need not come!	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
If there is no fear come to my right, O wife!	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
Come to my left, O mother!	*Tholachilama Tholachi*
So thought they	*Tholachilama Tholachi*

And in a pond into which they fell — *Tholachilama Tholachi*
They turned into statues.

The change into stone or immersing into water gives the character a newly acquired power and contradicts the earlier helplessness. Completely contained by human limitations and powerlessness, after becoming the victim of treachery, suddenly, in a moment the same character simply wills an act of change into a statue or embraces death. Linear and periodic time, within which the events take place, give way to a dimension of time which is eternal in the sense of enduring and coterminous with the present moment of its conception. Death in these instances is not the end, but a kind of regeneration into life. This is a recurring pattern in all the five oral ballads. Both man and nature, who defy the physical laws by which they are governed, are forced to experience the rite of death. However, the same becomes a possible triumph of life when the codes of virtue have not been disregarded or violated. These ballads following the continuum of life from the moment of birth up to the moment of death do not dilate upon the final event of reinstating the moral order ornately but, as mentioned earlier, suggest it as one more event in the sequence narrated through a fixed series of repetitions culminating in the key event of disturbance and then to the reinstallation of order. In "Yeladumban", the wicked mother-in-law, her daughter and husband who are her accomplices in the crime are done to death and the young husband Yeladumban kills himself. In "Thulasilamma", the mother-in-law, who is unable to stop her husband's sexual assault upon the daughter-in-law, joins her son along with the girl, enters the river and the three become statues leaving the father-in-law alone in his own realm of moral disorder. In this particular epic, as in "Jogi Nandamma", the disturbed world is forsaken and the victims or victim enter the waters and another realm of existence where moral disorder cannot take place. In "Thundu Malli" the wicked brothers are made to suffer hunger and servitude. No death occurs in this epic because Thundu Malli's husband escapes death, though the brothers plot it. Just as he returns with the bounties given to him by the king of the netherworld, so too the brothers after the period of punishment regain their prosperity, given in charity by the one they plotted to kill. Here humiliation, accompanied by the ravages of the famine, forms the retribution. What happens in these ballads, therefore, is much more than pathetic fallacy. The underlying conviction that enables the sequence of events is that to disturb one part of a harmonious whole is to disturb the whole of it. The contextualization of and participation in the phenomenon is part of the theme of the text itself, which is the epistemological predicament that the folklorist must overcome, as described by Robert Cantwell invoking John Rosenberg. It is not so intense to listeners and participants, inheriting rich regional heritages of myth and innumerable local legends that form alternative histories of people and places

in India.[11] It is not the resonance of human emotion or its extension into the realms of nature, conceived of only by the participating character in the text, but a belief that establishes itself as the tribe's tradition invoked through verbal art. In the ballad "Liamen" the incestuous uncle is put to death by his tribesmen. But above his grave a plant of prosperity or beauty does not grow as it does above the grave of the wronged girlchild. They are both buried side by side, for several reasons. In one sense they are husband and wife, but by placing their graves side by side there is a constant reminder to the tribe of the dreadful deed and its consequences, where the two different kinds of plants are yet other semiotic signs apart from the oral ballad and its verbal counterpart of a human event which by its transgression defines the social beliefs and values of the tribe. The participation in every event is thus both human and non-human, for the totality of existence is emphasized in this shared code of what is right and harmonious to their people and what is not. It is a sense of one continuous manifestation of life and consciousness. Although in all the ballads the woman's body is appropriated and governed by patriarchal power, such governance is critiqued by the event that follows it. The renewal in memory through song and its permanence through becoming part of the phenomenon, go beyond a simple state of sympathy and cooperation on the part of nature for the suffering man or woman. When an offence takes place it is not the girl's or the couple's life that is affected, but a whole pattern of existence where the tribe and all phenomenon together strive to keep order, harmony and mutual regard intact. So nature responds in an explicit participation through the emergence of a bitter berry plant upon Liamen's grave and the suspicious banana, which is a traditional symbol of progeny, upon the violated girl's grave.

In these ballads where sexual assault is the main event, the villain is father-in-law, uncle or brother and the victim is daughter-in-law, niece or sister.

[11] For further discussion, see Cantwell (2001). Cantwell quotes Rosenberg on the difficulty that folklorists feel in understanding unrealistic events, and the participation of nature in the textual events, in turn quoting John Ruskin's discussion on pathetic fallacy in poetry.

"Divinity is apt to get separated from the life of nature; and imagining our God upon a cloudy throne, far above the earth, and not in the flowers or the waters, we approach those visible things with a theory that they are . . . governed by physical laws. . . . But coming to them, we find the theory fails . . . that, say what we choose about them, the instinctive sense of their being alive is too strong for us; and in scorn of all physical law, the wilful fountain sings, and the kindly flowers rejoice . . . we fall necessarily into the curious web of hesitating sentiment, pathetic fallacy, and wandering fancy, which form a great part of our modern view of nature. But the Greek never removed his god out of nature at all; never attempted for a moment to contradict his instinctive sense that God was everywhere. . . . But in thus clearly defining his belief, observe, he threw it entirely into a human form, and gave his faith to nothing but the image of his own humanity" (Rosenberg 1963: 64–79).

The appropriation of the woman's body is the central event around which all other events revolve in a song. The threat to the familial relationships comes from within, from the guardians of the family and not from an enemy. The Irular *kootam* have no traditional enemies. Hence the subversion of domestic myths, distrust of age and family hierarchy stress the difficulty of containing the community, containing its actions within moral bounds, turning its history reflexively upon itself in its coincident attempt at self-definition. The ballad is both the critique of and the expression of its singers. The cultural wisdom of right and wrong are transmitted unselfconsciously without the text contrasting a state of decay with a mythical part. So too human lapses and deviations are encoded in the text with the sensitivity to the complexities of the human personality without overt expressions either of this understanding or evaluative statements.

In each of these ballads—even in "Yeladumban" where the killing of the daughter-in-law end the couple's marital ties—there is a breaking away from the socially accepted and prescribed norms of the relationship between man and woman as established in the institution of marriage. This institution is repeatedly dislodged and its inadequacies against the onslaught of human passion form the kernel of the song. Sexual assertion and seizure of the female body is facilitated by the power hierarchy within the family. This disengagement with the societal system is brought about by the agency of the traditional guardians of the family and its socio-ethical structures, the father or the younger brother of the father who in the extended family system is a "small father" and not just an uncle. In "Thulasiamma" the father appropriates the son's wife. The situation is later reversed and the father-in-law is killed by the young daughter-in-law with the consent of her mother-in-law. She executes the task with such determination that the man is killed at once. The exercise of the headship of the family is simultaneously in a contradictory manner, the destruction of it. As against this is the resistance of the female either through an exit from life or through the destruction of the norm-violating male. Such parameters of understanding coerce the social structures of the societies in the ballads within normative ethics that must be respected to keep the community in order. Physical relationships are monitored by unspoken moral relationships in the family and in society.

All the five ballads seem to follow a three-fold phase: the search for the girl or the penance for the birth of the girl and her arrival; the sexual appropriation of the girl and finally her metamorphosis and/or the death of the villain. There are other repetitive factors. The girl never has the power to confront the perpetrator of violence against her. In fact his power and superior positioning in the domestic hierarchy pushes her into the silence of death, which ironically becomes the moment of her empowerment. Her literal exit from life becomes her figurative re-emergence into permanence that breaks the earlier silence

and through rhetorical force represents her case. The girl, who is a victim, thus never recounts the disaster but her entry into death either by choice as a matter of honour or by violence becomes, in the hands of the narrator-singers, the dominant critique. In each of the cases this is the essential contradiction.

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[12] From his study of Indian tales, Ramanujan concludes that as against the European Oedipal aggression from child against parent, here it is directed from parent to child.

12

Gender and Empowerment
The Folklore of Garhwal

Satish C. Aikant
HNB Garhwal University, Pauri, India

Most studies about north Indian society have focussed on the regions of the Indo-Gangetic plain, neglecting the region of the Central Himalaya comprising what is now the state of Uttarakhand.[1] Because of its physical inaccessibility and difficult terrain, the area remained largely insulated from the mainstream of the socio-political life of the country. Consequently, not much was known about the land and the people other than what was contained in the reports of a few enterprizing divisional commissioners of the then British Raj. It was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that studies were carried out to explore its past.

Garhwal, a part of Uttarakhand, is mentioned as Kedar Khand in the *Skanda Purana* and in the "Vana Parva" of the *Mahabharata*. The original inhabitants of this land were Kols, descended from the Munda ethnic group. It is believed that they were pushed into the hills by the Dravidians retreating into this region in face of the Aryan onslaught from the northwest. In mediaeval times there were successive waves of migrations to this region from the Gangetic plain, Punjab and Rajasthan. Subsequently, the Kiratas came in from the east and forced the Kol-Mundas to seek shelter in the remote valleys. Then came the Khasas from the west, who subjugated both the Kols and the Kiratas. Many other races including the Nagas and the Huns also came and intermixed with different waves of immigrants. The Khasas were dominated by the people who came from the Indo-Gangetic plain. In the early fourteenth century, Ajay Pal of the Parmar dynasty united the region by bringing 52 principalities under his sovereign rule. Since then it has been known as Garhwal.

[1] The state of Uttarakhand was constituted in 2000 out of the parent state of Uttar Pradesh. The state is unique as nearly 63 per cent of its area is covered by forests. About 93 per cent of the state is hilly and only 7 per cent constitutes the plains.

In colonial times, the middle class, which emerged in India, was trying to find an identity for itself by a complex process of negotiation, which Bhabha has called "colonial mimicry" (1994: 87). With resistance to British imperial culture, arenas evolved in the public sphere to provide discursive space for citizens, particularly the nationalists, to foster public opinion against the colonial hegemony which was directly impacting their lives. Garhwal, however, could not actively take its place in such discursive space. Owing to its remoteness and the underprivileged status and non-literacy of a large majority of its people, it could not form "an imagined community" with the rest of the country. In recent decades literacy rates have registered an impressive increase. However, Garhwal's indigenous culture, in particular its folklore transmitted mainly through oral narratives, did play a role in helping construct the ideology of the groups living here. It may be stressed that folklore[2] construed as an "autotelic" ensemble travelling from group to group and not as "autonomous cultural expressions" (Jabbour 2004: 22) is integral to understanding a culture and is expressive of "the symbolic language of the non-literate part" (Ramanujan 2001: 532) of one's self.

The unique environment of Garhwal has conditioned the outlook, manners, customs and traditions of the people living here.[3] Their folklore has traditionally made them feel connected and enabled them to articulate their life's experiences and aspirations. This rich folklore sheds light on the social and cultural conditions of the region. It makes innumerable references to mediaeval times, contextualizing religious, social and political history. Hence the study of folklore has great historical significance apart from its intrinsic cultural value. The local bards have preserved the legends, which have come down to us mainly through oral tradition.

Historically, Garhwal has seen an admixture of the Aryan and the indigenous cultures, which is evident in the co-existence of the Great Tradition of learning and culture as opposed to the Little Tradition of the indigenes.[4] There is, however, a symbiotic relationship between the two. Robert Redfield's contention that "in a civilization, there is a Great Tradition of the reflective few

2 "Folklore" is used here as a collective term for those traditional items of knowledge or lore that as recurring performances are communicated through oral transmissions. The Indian equivalent of folklore, *lokayana*, coined by Suniti Kumar Chatterji, expresses the real intent of folklore as it signifies a way of life (*ayana*) of a people (*loka*). There is, however, no universal agreement on the boundaries of various genres of folklore. In Garhwal, folk songs and folk stories are the more prevalent genres.

3 One of the earliest studies documenting the folklore of Garhwal was conducted by Tara Dutt Gairola. See Oakley and Gairola (2001).

4 For comments on the dialectical categories within the Indian tradition (*Marga*, the mainstream tradition dominated by the Brahmanical Sanskrit culture, and *Desi*, referring to the regional language expression), in the manner of the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition, see Devy (1998).

and a Little Tradition of the largely unreflective many" (quoted in Ramanujan 2001: 535) takes a patronizing view of what he calls "the unreflective many". A rich repertoire of folklore in India incorporates not only the texts of the Great Tradition, but also the innumerable variables of it found in the indigenous cultures constituting the Little Tradition. Written and hallowed texts are not the only ones available in a culture such as the Indian. Oral traditions of every kind have produced texts and "cultural performances" (Singer 1972: 47), which are enacted at various ceremonies or social rituals. Furthermore, every cultural performance not only creates texts, but also carries them forward as the dynamics of folklore.

Although the caste system, with its attendant discriminatory practices and distribution of power among various groups, has been a pervasive feature of Garhwali society, a distinctive feature of it is that the scheduled caste "doms", who are mostly artisans, are not treated with contempt. Their traditional rights, which are socially recognized, have acquired statutory sanction, and their interactions with the higher castes are reflected in many of the rituals and customs of the people. This can also be attributed to the amalgamation of the Brahmanical tradition and the mediaeval Bhakti tradition, represented by Kabir and Dadu who were popular among the "low" castes in Garhwal and created several of the *gathas* or narratives. The influence of Gorakhnath was particularly pronounced. The *gathas* related to Nirankar, popular among the "low" castes, are obviously influenced by the Kabir and the Nirguna traditions. These legends are often critical of orthodox Brahmanism. Such narratives were composed or altered by different social groups to legitimize their beliefs.

A prominent form of Garhwal folklore, known as *jagar*, incorporates such narratives. Living in close proximity of the snow-clad mountains, the Paharis have assimilated beliefs in the spirits, gods and demons that characterize their mythology. The interplay of the Great and Little Tradition is conspicuous in the *Jagar Gathas* of Uttarakhand. *Jagar* is a "spirit possession ceremony" (or *séance*), in which a deity is invoked, through the medium of a chosen person, to the accompaniment of ritual music of drums and singing of religious narratives—the *gathas*. Presiding over the ceremony is a *jagariya*. This is a priest conversant with the spirit lore. He invokes various gods like Nagaraja or Narsingh with his incantations, while playing on his *donr*, (also known as *damaun*) a sort of kettledrum and *thali*, a bronze plate. His incantations and the musical rhythm trigger a sudden response in the medium who then reflexively sways to the tune and comes under the spell of the spirit. The spirit then renders appropriate counsel for the well-being of the family. The *jagariyas*, invariably from the "dom" caste, are called upon to perform the ritual to cure illnesses in the family, to appease ancestral spirits or to ward off misfortunes. An unrequited spirit can also be summoned through an appropriate ritual. The *jagariya* is in a commanding position at the ceremony and the privilege extended to him can

be seen as empowerment of the "low" castes, since it involves appropriation of a high caste status, which otherwise the caste groups resent. In fact, *jagariyas* are viewed with awe and respect by all sections of the hill society.

Various deities, many of them feminine, are eulogized in the *gathas*. Many *gathas* follow Puranic traditions and themes, coloured by local beliefs reflecting the material realities of life. They show the influence of Vaishnvism associated with Krishna, Rukmini, Pandavas, and also of the Sakti cult associated with Siva and Parvati. The popularity of Parvati is evident in *Nanda Ki Gatha*, which shows the intense desire of Nanda, another name for Parvati, for her father's home. She was married to Siva, the ascetic, an apparently unequal match for her. Contrary to the orthodox depiction of Parvati's unquestioning devotion to Siva, her insistent longing for her parental home carries the undertone of an unhappy and unequal marriage. The subtext of the narrative reflects the hard lives of Garhwali women, their alienation and their longing for the familiar environs of the parental home. A popular *jagar gatha* goes like this:

Char din swami, mee mait jayondawu,
Raat deen Gaura tweeko kano mait hoyu?
Byali saanj bodi mee mait jayondu
Aaj raat bodi swami mee mait jayodo
Saanj ko sabere Nanda tyaro kano mait hoye?
Bhai bhateejon ki swami khud lagi rain
Budya bwe babu ki bhi khud lagi rain
Kuyi baini deene baba na saina Sirinagar
Kuyi baini deene baba na banka Bangarh
Kui baini deene baba na naulakha Salaan
Kui baini deene baba na kali Kumaon
Sabu se ladali mee dinyu yeen Trisuli
Twe baba par meru saraap padyan
Jain dilayee hols meeku tain bhangphuka jogi ku (Chatak 1996: 149)

My lord let me go to my father's home just for four days
O Gauri, what is this talk of father's home day and night?
Only last evening you said you wanted to go there
You repeated it in the night
What is this home that you keep harping on?
My lord I sorely miss my siblings,
And I think of my old parents
My father sent out in marriage
One of my sisters to the plains of Srinagar
Another was sent off to the lovely land of Bangarh
Another was married off to Salaan
While the fourth was sent off to Kali Kumaon
I, the darling daughter have been condemned to this Trisul
Curse be upon you, my father
Who has married me to this Jogi ever stoned

Since women do not have real choice in matters of marriage, mismatched marriages are all too common in Garhwal. Women use songs to express their reluctance to change homes and leave their familiar environment. They put forth several reasons—dislike of the husband for being too old, his unsympathetic behaviour, hostility of the in-laws and hard work expected of them. There is a substantial degree of male migration in these parts and the menfolk remain away from their villages for long periods of time doing odd jobs in the cities. In their absence, women have to rely upon their own resourcefulness. They have to live, work and raise families virtually by themselves. Their travails are related in their songs, through which they unburden themselves of their sorrows. These songs follow the moods, seasons, activities and events, touching upon every stage of a woman's life cycle—recounting her several roles at home and in society. Even the love songs that describe the beauty and accomplishments of a woman, enumerate the qualities, which would make her "useful" in the in-laws' family. The subtext of patriarchy is all too evident in such songs. *Mangal geet* or the songs sung at weddings invoke gods and goddesses to consecrate the ceremony and bless the couple with the birth of a boy.

While the social functions of folklore have been identified as education, maintaining group identity, amusement or entertainment, what is more important is that folklore performs a "safety valve function", which not only relieves the pent-up emotions of the woman, but also subverts the prevailing attitudes and institutional practices. The cultural sphere of folklore in traditional societies is effectively used to articulate protest and dissent as well as aspirations. Thus it generates an alternative potential for the quest for emancipation from oppressive patriarchal systems. In effect it provides "a cultural poetics" (Sarma 2006: 87) for social communication. As a "medium of expression" (Capila 2002: 55), these songs are a channel of communication and a creative act by which rural women identify themselves and feel empowered.

There is a distinct genre of folk lyrics, known as *khuder geet*, which are meant to stir the filial longings in the heart of a woman separated from her father's home. She calls upon nature to help her glimpse the home she misses. A popular lyric goes like this:

Hey unchi dandiyun tum nisi java,
Ghani kulayun tum chhanti howa,
Main lagin cha khud maitura ki
Baba ji ko mait dekhan deva. (Chatak 2000: 58)

Which can be rendered as:

Bend down ye hills,
Disperse ye crowded pines,
Let me see my father's home,
My heart for that place pines.

Such songs, which obviously deal with the natural environment, take on an ecological perspective since they gain a context against the backdrop of bountiful nature with rich forests, streams, etc. If the exploitation of forests goes on, it will be difficult to visualize what the song describes. In fact such scenarios against the backdrop of dense forests, as alluded to in the song, are already getting rarer with the drive for modernization in the hills of Uttarakhand. This drive has picked up momentum with the land and forest mafia becoming active ever since the creation of the state in the year 2000.

With the reigning discourse of globalization, the process of "cultural de-differentiation" (Lash 1990: 5) has also set in. Since the modernizing enterprise privileges the elite over the folk and the literary over the oral, it is the elite who appropriate the right to express the folk, and thereby interpret their lore as they wish and not as it ought to be. In the regime of globalization there is a tendency towards greater homogenization, which undermines the claims of its advocates to encourage recognition of cultural relativism and localized traditions. It creates a dichotomous situation for the representation and interpretation of folklore and its underlying subtexts. As economic forces become increasingly obdurate, the weaker groups, especially the women, are marginalized. Yet, even as it tends to support the institutions and behaviour patterns of a culture, folklore has a remarkable capacity for acculturation, assimilation, adjustment and conservation. In the realm of popular culture, it acquires fluidity. It is shared and disseminated. Folklore has not remained unaffected by the processes of globalization. It is changing its form and content day by day as it re-shapes cultural identities. In India technologies are being exploited to preserve the oral by creating archives for its documentation and dissemination.[5]

The women in Garhwal traditionally constitute the backbone of the hill economy as they have to engage in multiple roles. They have a crucial role in agriculture, in livestock management as well as in various household chores. Men are usually concerned with ploughing the fields and in construction and repair of their houses. The forests of the Garhwal Himalaya have been central to the livelihood of the people. Prior to British intervention in 1815, community institutions of the hill peasantry, such as the village panchayats, had effectively exercised control over the use and management of both cultivated and uncultivated lands within customary village boundaries. They respected the conservation values embedded in local culture and religious traditions such as the maintenance of sacred groves—sections of forest dedicated to deities or ancestral spirits. The groves were meant to be left undisturbed for ever. In the Hindu worldview nature has a ritual significance, and a form of utilitarian conservatism as opposed to protectionist conservatism is generally followed

5 Considerable work has been done in this regard at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi, the Bhasha Research Centre in Baroda and the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh.

(Misra 2007: 139). However, under colonial rule, and even after independence, the state-managed Forest Department made increasing penetration into the hills (this was intensified following the border road-building activities urgently taken up after the Sino-Indian War of 1962). These activities proved ecologically degrading. The local people argued that developmental activities and ecological concerns should also address the needs of the poor. Unfortunately the Indian state and agencies such as the World Bank seemingly disregarded the historical, cultural and spiritual ties of the people with the land which, in development discourse, is considered as merely a commodity.[6] In fact top-down interventions through World Bank funded projects in Uttarakhand have resulted in disrupting and marginalizing people's struggles and achievements, transferring power and authority to the Forest Department and the local elite. They are insensitive to the dynamic functioning of existing self-governing institutions, and the women's ongoing struggles within them to gain greater voice in and control over forest resources to improve their quality of life and livelihood security (Sarin 2001: 342).

Amidst contesting approaches to development[7] there arose a powerful environment movement. Early in 1973, the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal, a small co-operative of artisans in Chamoli district founded and led by Chandi Prasad Bhatt, requested permission from the Forest Department to fell two ash trees in the nearby forest for wood to make tools for the purpose of agriculture. They were refused permission. At the same time, a commercial firm from the plains was granted permission to fell trees. The villagers devised a plan to stop the commercial felling and decided to act on Bhatt's suggestion: "Let them know that we will not allow the felling of ash trees. When they aim their axes upon them, we will embrace the trees" (Weber 1988: 40).

Thus was born the Chipko Movement (*Chipko*, Hindi for "to stick to", or "to hug").[8] The movement cannot be romanticized as a "return to some pristine traditional village life".[9] Rather as a functional livelihood strategy, the women fought determinedly to prevent the complete clearance of their forest (Mawdsley 1998: 8). In face of repeated protests by the villagers, the commercial

[6] Since the early 1980s through the 1990s, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have been attacking traditional communities under the guise of "Structural Adjustment" and "globalization". See Federici (2004).

[7] G. N. Devy questions the efficacy of the prevailing discourse on development fashioned in the West, and argues for the indigenous pathways to progress and development. See Devy (2006: 123–42).

[8] For a comprehensive history of the Chipko Movement, see Guha (2000).

[9] The village as a metaphor for subsistence farming in a communal setting, has also been a crucial site for women's struggles, providing a base from which to reclaim the wealth the state had been appropriating from it.

firm was forced to retreat. The movement recorded its first success. By going beyond their immediate local need to embrace a wider spatial and temporal universe, Chipko became a "meaningful social movement with regional implications" (ibid.: 39). It addressed a serious concern of many hill people that the state's management of forests offered few dividends to the locals in this already economically marginalized area, and further that it degraded the ecological base upon which local people depended. The steep slopes of the middle Himalaya do not offer rich agricultural pickings, though the forests provide essential inputs of fertilizer (in the form of leaf mulch), grazing, fodder, fuel and a host of other non-timber forest produce, such as medicinal herbs, fibres and foodstuff. Given this situation, the alienating and often deeply insensitive encroachments of colonial forestry laws, which prevented the villagers from making use of any forest wealth in their region, provoked strong resistance of the people (ibid.: 2).

The Chipko activists included village women and men, Gandhians such as Sarla Behn, Mira Behn, former politician Sunderlal Bahuguna and his wife, Vimala, and Chandi Prasad Bhatt, members of forest labour cooperatives, students from leftist political parties and others. This wide range of participants gave Chipko diverse strategies. It was termed as a movement, "a path towards a green earth and a true civilization and an explicitly ecological *and* feminist movement" (Shiva 1988: 76).

Particular mention must be made of Gaura Devi. At the village of Raini in Chamoli district, when the contractors of the forest department were about to fell trees, she mobilized 27 women who rushed to the forest and clung to the marked trees, forcing the contractor's men to withdraw. As recounted by Gaura Devi, "Our men were out of the village so we had to come forward and protect the trees. We have no quarrel with anybody, but only we wanted to make the people understand that our existence is tied with the forests" (quoted in Guha 2000: 159).

The demonstration at Raini, marked the major entry of women into the Chipko movement. Gaura Devi has become part of folklore for the way in which she represents the central features of the movement, the economic stance, women as protectors of nature and the power of the local people. The life of Gaura Devi has become the subject of a folk song by Dhan Singh Rana, a local bard, who narrates her life's struggle thus:

> Today, Gaura, the people remember you,
> Today again our environment is exposed to destruction.
> You are benevolent, you come to our minds.
> Always you were poor, but never without honour and wisdom.
> You cared for all the villages during both happiness and grief,
> You never cared for yourself, only for others.

It was Gaura, who called upon the people: 'Save the forest!'
Who inspired the women to come to the forest,
With their bare hands the women went to the jungle
And like the voice of the forest she spoke up:
'Do not break our affinity to the forest, rooted since generations.
Sisters, let yourselves be cut with the trees, but do not abandon and leave.
Cling to the trees, hug them, but don't let them be cut.
These, the property of the hills—don't let them steal them.
Women, you who are the beloveds of the forest, hug the trees!'

The villagers one after the other took the responsibility as chaukidars,
In the whole country the news from our forest spread.
As long as the jungle remains, Gaura, your memory too will remain.[10]

Here Gaura is treated almost like a mythological figure who is urged to take birth again and to help the common people in their struggle against injustice. She is like the Goddess Devi incarnated as *mahisasurmardini* to slay the demon of injustice.

Chipko often gets highlighted in eco-feminist discourse, which is based on the woman/culture connection. Vandana Shiva sees the women, particularly the rural women as "embedded in nature" (Shiva 1988: xvi). It is true that women universally have some fundamental sensitivity to the land, air and water with which they are intimately associated and have a stronger "ethic of care" for others, including the environment. According to Shiva, women are the custodians of *Prakriti*—nature or the feminine principle—which is the manifestation of *Shakti*, the divine feminine creative energy of the cosmos. *Prakriti* seeks to nurture and maintain the harmony and diversity of the natural forests as a life source from which men and developed industrial cultures are alienated, and which must be recovered. When this holistic view is replaced by the commercial paradigm it signifies for women "simultaneously a beginning of their marginalization, devaluation, displacement and ultimate dispensability" (ibid.: 42). This transformation is triggered by the arrival of the masculinist, reductionist, industrial and colonizing forces. According to Shiva, the equation between ecological self-sustenance and the feminine principle is undermined by the exploitative forces of global capitalism:

> An ecologically sustainable future has much to gain from the world-views of ancient civilizations and diverse cultures which survived sustainably over centuries. These were based on an ontology of the feminine as the living principle . . . . Not merely did this result in an ethical context which excluded possibilities of exploitation and domination, it allowed the creation of an earth family. (Ibid.: 41)

[10] See Linkenbach (2001). The song is translated from Garhwali into English by Linkenbach.

It is in this context that the activism of the women like Gaura Devi, Sarla Behn and Vimala Bahuguna is seen as a significant intervention. Sunderlal Bahuguna himself, while underlining women's power, concedes: "We are the runners and messengers—the real leaders are the women" (quoted in Shiva 1988: 70).

The ecological protest movements in the Himalayan region have always operated within the structural principles of democracy and democratic organizations. The slogan of a movement launched by the women of Garhwal, known as "Rakhi Bandho Movement", goes:

Paidon ka tum sun lo krandan
Kar do unka Raksha Bandhan

Listen to the cries of trees.
Protect them by tying rakhis to them

So the women tied *rakhis* to the trees, as if they were their brothers. Even men followed suit, overriding the inherent gender connotation. Women and men took collective onus for the protection of the trees. The slogan made an emotional appeal and invoked tradition to involve people in organizing protest. The folk invocation hopes that the day is not far when the Himalaya shall awaken in its full glory and the killer axe shall cease to exist:

Aaj Himalaya jaagega
Kroor kulhara bhagega

The people of the Garhwal hills have nurtured a fascinating culture. It is in this spirit that the folklore of Garhwal tells us not only about reverence for all life, but also takes us closer to the elemental forces that sustain life. The study of folklore can result in greater environmental awareness.[11] Much needs to be done by way of research in this area. Today, we have analytical tools provided by social anthropology, literary criticism and popular culture, which can be used to analyze and document the narratives, including the oral narratives that go into the making of the folklore of Garhwal, to study it in the context of society, gender and environment, and to understand the nature of dissent, protest and social change in the hill community.

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13

Ngũgĩ's Indigenous Language Novels
Women and the National Cause

Joseph McLaren
Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York, USA

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is perhaps the principal African advocate of writing in indigenous languages. His position is consistent with the cause of indigenous people globally in maintaining their languages and preserving their particular cultures. Ngũgĩ's novels written in Gĩkũyũ and translated into English include *Devil on the Cross* (1982), *Matigari* (1989) and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006)—his most recent work and one for which he provided the translation into English as he did with *Devil on the Cross*. Especially following his exile from Kenya, Ngũgĩ as been committed to the national cause and his Gĩkũyũ novels have dealt with the dilemmas of government and civil society in the post-Independence era. The language debate among African writers has been a topic of concern since the 1960s. With the publication of *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, Ngũgĩ was considered by well-known critic Odun Balogun as "the first among foremost African novelists to make the novel truly African" (Balogun 1997: ix).

Although it might be argued that Ngũgĩ could have achieved the same critical message regarding the Kenyan state in relation to Western hegemony and global capital through novels written in English, the act of writing his novels in his mother tongue initially is itself a political message, one that supports his argument against language domination and the assumed centrality of the English language. What is also significant about Ngũgĩ's presentation of the national cause is that in his Gĩkũyũ novels, women are in the foreground of his critique of the neo-colonial and global order. Ngũgĩ is one of a number of African male writers "who challenge the traditional social and political dominance of patriarchy and who support women's issues" (Davies 1986: 11).

The ending of Ngũgĩ's last novel written in English, *Petals of Blood* (1977), can be viewed as the beginning of *Devil on the Cross*. Using a quite different narrative technique, *Devil on the Cross* is a mixture of story, song and bitter political satire. It is essentially a work that explores the idea of political and

economic corruption by presenting a story that revolves around the meeting of thieves and robbers in Ilmorog, the same setting as *Petals of Blood*.

Similar to the development of a central character in *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ also portrays a courageous woman in *Devil on the Cross*, Wariinga, who too undergoes a transformation after her experiences in Ilmorog. Linked romantically to a male character Gatuiria, Wariinga is described as having removed her jeans and is seen wearing "a long *kitenge* dress of red and white flowers. Her hair is tied in plaits running from the front of her head to the back" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1982: 224).

In linking sexuality and political issues in this work, Ngũgĩ couples corrupt sexuality with a representation of economic exploitation represented in "the Rich Old Man" who attempts to seduce Wariinga. Wariinga, who has mastered the martial arts and has become an auto mechanic, eventually shoots the Rich Old Man. The closing remarks are similar in tone to the ending of *Petals of Blood*, where Wanja exhibits a variety of identities, "schoolgirl, unwed mother, barmaid, destitute prostitute and poor peasant". In general, Wanja "has our sympathy in her efforts to survive in the cruel capitalist system" (Adagala 1985: 22).

Wariinga ultimately stands for the pinnacle of women's power and the coalescence of male power represented in both labour and physical force. Like Wanja, Wariinga is also a woman in transition, one who has been exploited by the forces of neo-colonialism. Wariinga, as part of the historical period that follows the struggle for independence, is closely paralleled to Wanja of *Petals of Blood*. Wariinga labours as a secretary on the lower rungs of the hierarchy of power. She represents the urbanized African woman, removed from the village and faced with the seemingly ever-present demands for sexual gratification of an employer.

Because *Devil on the Cross* is written in a highly satirical and fabulist manner, the portrayal of Wariinga is at times achieved through the narrator's explanation of character from an omniscient distance that allows for the telling of her story in expansive terms. She is introduced as a victim in three respects: she is dismissed for rejecting the sexual advances of her "Boss" Kihara; she is spurned by her boyfriend, who accuses her of being the Boss's mistress; and, soon afterwards, she is evicted from her residence after her landlord raises the rent. Wariinga is also dissatisfied with her physical identity, especially her skin colour, for she "hated her blackness [...] and would disfigure her body with skin-lightening creams like Ambi and Snowfire" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1982: 11).

Like the dualism of Wanja, who realises the pull of conflicting forces, Wariinga is a mixture of retrogressive consciousness and progressive enlightenment. When she narrates the story of "any other girl in Nairobi", a woman she calls Mahua Kareendi, expresses the cycle, the progression from education in the

village Harambee school to early pregnancy as the result of contact with a student, a loafer or a rich man (ibid.: 17). She voices a scenario that parallels her own dilemma, ending up in Nairobi, repelling the advances of the Boss. Wariinga's story of "any other girl in Nairobi" identifies the elements that might place the modern urban African woman in a position of powerlessness, and these forces are clearly represented as male and in economic control.

> To the Kareendis of modern Kenya, isn't each day exactly the same as all the others? For the day on which they are born is the very day on which every part of their body is buried except one—they are left with a single organ. So when will the Kareendis of modern Kenya wipe the tears from their faces? When will they ever discover laughter? (Ibid.: 26)

Ngũgĩ foregrounds the dilemmas of the sexual exploitation and economic oppression of African women, a corollary to the network of discrepancies of neo-colonialism. Wariinga is also portrayed in *Devil on the Cross* as a visionary, a seer who projects the dominant symbol of the novel, echoing the way Nyakinyua had been closely aligned to the major metaphor of *Petals of Blood*. Wariinga envisions the "crowd of people dressed in rags walking in the light, propelling the Devil towards the Cross" (ibid.: 13).

The journey of Wariinga and the other passengers in the *matatu* is one that leads to the eventual emancipation of Wariinga in the areas of labour and physical power. When she eventually gains the skills of the mechanic and the martial powers of karate, she is well armed to meet aggression and to right the wrongs of the past. Unlike the cycle of Wanja in *Petals of Blood*, who fulfils a rebirth in a literal sense, Wariinga's cycle brings her to reclamation of the primal Mumbi powers, equal if not superior to male power. Wariinga becomes a kind of modern Mumbi and, in her arming of herself, is also a *Penda* figure as in Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood* (1962).

It has been argued that the portrayal of Wariinga's transformation could be seen as "trite" or stereotypical, but that Ngũgĩ "breathes something of his own convictions into his semi-ritualistic process", the transformation of Wariinga (Cook and Okenimkpe 1983: 136–37). Her transformation is complete by the close of the novel, in that she reclaims her traditional self when she is "dressed in the Gĩkũyũ way" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1982: 242). Her dress is in contrast to Wanja's donning of the miniskirt. In traditional garb, she assassinates the Rich Old Man and states, "'There kneels a jigger, a louse, a weevil, a flea, a bedbug! He is a mistletoe, a parasite that lives on the trees of other peoples's lives!'" (ibid.: 254). The ending is obviously didactic, and its fabulist image of the modern African woman suggests the destruction of the neo-colonial male who has been guilty of crimes of sexual exploitation and economic domination.

The fabulist portrayal of African women was continued in Ngũgĩ's *Matigari*, his sixth novel. Banned by the Kenyan authorities, it was later translated into

English by Wangũi wa Goro for the Heinemann edition published in 1989. The structure of *Matigari* is based on an apparently simple story line involving the return of Matigari, a forest warrior resembling a Land and Freedom Army hero, to a fictional city, which resembles Nairobi. The elements of story and song, the repetition of key passages and phrases, as well as the clear identification of colonial and neo-colonial forces, shape the structural and thematic content of the fable.

Irony, the mode that Ngũgĩ uses effectively in his satirical writing, is employed when he introduces Guthera, who does not at all resemble the traditional homebound woman. Like Wanja, Guthera is familiar with the world of bars and urban life. When she enters the Mataha Hotel, Bar and Restaurant and explains that she is being pursued by a policeman, who follows her as if she were "a bitch on heat [sic]", the distance between Matigari's notions of the ideal woman and the reality of Guthera begins to shorten. Guthera's physical beauty is recognized, her "teeth that gleam white like milk, a mass of hair so black and soft" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1989: 27–28). As with Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*, Guthera is more of a symbolic trope than a woman whose consciousness is explored in a multi-layered way as with Wanja in *Petals of Blood*.

The exchange between Guthera and Matigari forms the beginning of her transition from bar girl to a symbol of solidarity with the struggle of the workers. Her propositioning of Matigari highlights the distance from his understanding of the transformations that have occurred during his years of seclusion in the forest. Guthera voices materialism and the needs of daily survival, the demands of prostitution: "Even if a boy like this one came to me with money in his pocket, I would give him such delights as he has never dreamt of" (ibid.: 29). Although this might appear to be another characterization of the African woman as prostitute, it bears a different significance. That Guthera refuses to sleep with a policeman signifies a political consciousness and the circumstances that give rise to prostitution rather than a continuation of the stereotype. The later identification of Guthera as "mother" echoes the Mumbi principle, which is bound up with the symbolic unity characterized in Gĩkũyũ-Mumbi cosmology.

Part Three of *Matigari*, "Gũthera na Mũriũki—The Pure and the Resurrected", includes a story of Gũthera's most dreaded fear, sleeping with a policeman (ibid.: 95–96). Matigari's re-telling of Gũthera's story reveals that she has sacrificed herself, broken one of her commandments and succumbed to her fear in order to free Matigari from prison. She is a kind of reversed Christ figure, a woman who has sacrificed herself for the salvation of Matigari or the ideals of the revolutionary struggle.

The work ends with Matigari's disappearance with Gũthera into the river after their eventual capture and assault by police and dogs, which "tore at their clothes, their flesh". Their becoming united is a rebirth of consciousness, as

their "blood mingled and it trickled into the soil, on the banks of the river" (ibid.: 173).

In *Matigari*, Ngũgĩ suggests a symbolic vision of the African woman. This vision is a combination of the Gĩkũyũ cosmological notion of the primacy of women as progenitors and as Mumbi, unified with the male. It is also an image of the modernization of the cosmology to include the political and social consciousness demonstrated by Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*.

The expansive scope of *Wizard of the Crow* suggests a saga of the nation, although the first one-third is constructed around a discrete period of time. One observer noted in the *San Francisco Chronicle:* "'Wizard of the Crow' may prove his [Ngũgĩ's] status, but only for those willing to wrestle with its incredibly demanding text. Nevertheless, the novel has many rewards for those willing to face its challenges" (Hellman 2006). The review of the novel in Nairobi's *Daily Nation* did not address any of the complications of Ngũgĩ's standing in his homeland, but noted that the novel was voted by *Time* magazine's Europe edition as the third best book of 2006. The review further stated that "the significance of [the] launch was, no doubt, the university's proximity to Uhuru Park, which appears to be the locale for the 750-page tome that took six years to write". The novel was seen as displaying a "seductive playfulness" and being "eerily reminiscent of Kanu's efforts to build a skyscraper in Uhuru Park in the early 1990s" (1).

The novel is divided into six books: "Power Daemons", "Queuing Daemons", "Female Daemons", "Male Daemons", "Rebel Daemons", and "Bearded Daemons". This structure is indicative of its Kenyan serialization in the Gĩkũyũ language. In the novel, the "Ruler"—unnamed like the "Rich Old Man"—the head of the Free Republic of Aburiria, the central figure of mockery, has an inflated sense of himself and is satirized in a project linked to the ironic treatment of Christian symbolism. The "Ruler" can stand for all megalomaniacs in a global perspective, including the North and the South.

> The Ruler would be the daily recipient of God's advice, resulting in a rapid growth of Aburiria to heights never before dreamt by humans. The entire project, Heavenscape or simply Marching to Heaven, would be run by a National Building Committee, the chair of which would be announced in good time. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 2006: 16)

Numerous examples of parody are suggested in the depiction of the "Ruler's" relationship to his ministers, who are sycophantic characters. In portraying the Ruler as wielding absolute power, the novel constructs his underlings as absurd. For example, the ministers Silver Sikiokuu, Minister of State, and Markus Machokali, Minister of Foreign Affairs, are placed in a continual adversarial position, each trying to undermine the other in an attempt to gain

privileges from the Ruler. This is one of the major satirical strands of the novel. Their surgery to enhance various features such as the eyes and ears, representing the organs of the State, is another satirical device in the novel; Machokali's eyes are enlarged and Sikiokuu has oversized ears. The story-like quality of the novel is enhanced by deviations from the realistic mode, generally termed "magic realism", the primary style of Gabriel García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Ngũgĩ's avoidance of the realistic mode adds to the satire, since humour targeted at State leadership is broadly conceived beyond the domains of Aburiria. Nevertheless, "realistic" concerns are implied in such social considerations as HIV/AIDS, mentioned a number of times in the novel, and other symbolic and "satirical" viruses, such as "white-ache"—the infirmity that afflicts Tajirika, another central character. Another illness affects his speech, resulting in his only being able to articulate the word *If*, which supposedly in the Gĩkũyũ language means "If only", implying a different interpretation of its ironic significance.

Ngũgĩ also employs a range of scatological and olfactory references to identify the ruling class, where money is associated with stench, rotting bodies with one of the ministers and excrement with a method used by Tajirika, to end his own imprisonment. Most important, the novel's presentation of national issues supports the dispossessed or marginalized—those who are manipulated by internal business interests. This concern is expressed through the dilemmas of the Kamiti, the Wizard.

The women characters in *Wizard of the Crow* are central to Ngũgĩ's motives found in his earlier novels because he maintains a Gĩkũyũ-Mumbi representation, the balancing of the male and female principle through Nyawira, the Wizard's ally and lover, who is the former assistant to Tajirika. In her role as part of the Movement for the Voice of the People, she signifies the power of women to resist State authority. At one point, the Wizard and Nyawira are in an idyllic "Sacred Grove"-like setting, which suggests such contemporary themes as pollution and environmental destruction. Nyawiria also stands for empowerment when she disrupts the meeting of Marching to Heaven by distributing plastic snakes; she leads other women who resist the power of the State. The assemblage of women becomes a threat to the Ruler and their disruption of a later meeting is a further indication of their threat to the social order.

Another section of the novel addresses wife beating, which, since Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* has become identified as a general symptom of African patriarchy—although domestic violence is a major contemporary Western problem. By subjecting Tajirika, who beats his wife Vinjinia, to similar abuse by the group of women, Ngũgĩ draws attention to questions of retribution and justice. (Intertextually, the threat of removal of Tajirika's penis echoes the actions in African-American writer Gayl Jones' novel *Corregidora* [1975],

where a woman castrates a male oppressor.) The offence of wife-beating is addressed satirically through the Ruler's establishment of a plan in which men are encouraged to abuse their wives as part of their privileges. The absurdity of the Ruler's desire to control women's power is expressed in the creation of a research project.

> You have proven that you can be trusted to organise youth and be tough with women, even the wives of the rich and the powerful. Effective today, you are Head of Research Regarding Youth and Women's Conformity with National Ideals. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 2006: 557)

By reducing to the absurd the issues concerning the abuse of women, the novel suggests that this subject is of national concern and should be addressed in the political arena.

The development of Nyawira's character as the advisor and lover of the Wizard is augmented by the representation of Indian philosophy. Certain scenes in which the two contemplate a range of issues are set in a restaurant owned by an Indian, Gautama, through whom Indian thought is presented. His meditative posture, both literally and figuratively, is compatible with the philosophical temperament of Kamiti and Nyawira. Also, Nyawira's role in the novel's later chapters further emphasizes the importance of the "voice" of women in the national cause and in many ways replicates the pattern in Ngũgĩ's earlier novels, emphasizing the unity principle, in this case suggested by the characterization of Nyawira and the Wizard in a natural landscape.

Although Ngũgĩ valorizes a Gĩkũyũ linguistic priority, the use of the language does not necessarily constitute a privileging of Gĩkũyũ ethnicity within the political or national realm. More significant for the national cause is the gender question and the way political power controlled by men is threatened by the interventions of women. Overall, the images of women in Ngũgĩ's indigenous language novels are tied to a range of political, social and cultural considerations. To an extent, the principal women characters in these novels are symbolic figures, which stand for rectification within the nation, and because they are part of the fabulist and "magic realism" styles Ngũgĩ employs, they may at times appear unidimensional. However, this element of their characterization is effectively offset by an important goal of Ngũgĩ's indigenous language novels, which was especially relevant during recent periods of political upheaval in African nations, resulting in a disproportionately negative effect on the lives of women. Portraying women as central to African fiction can help to sustain a necessary gender consciousness.

Also of great importance is the underlying assertion that African languages can convey the complexity of contemporary experience as effectively as European languages. For Ngũgĩ this in not merely an exercise in translation, but a way of increasing the longevity of indigenous expression during a time

when the globalizing influences of so-called "world" languages necessitate a revival of mother tongues.

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14

Colonial Narrative and Indigenous Consciousness

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Ignazio Silone's *Fontamara*

Stefano Mercanti
University of Udine, Italy

The current debate between the "new" Literatures in English and the "received" Anglo-Celtic narratives of colonially-driven national history and identity, has been mired, more often than not, in mutual recrimination and misunderstanding. This is to be expected, since the experience of human societies of the last centuries—as well as the long span of both history and pre-history—has been one of rigid rankings, violence and authoritarianism, which affected not only structured relations, institutions and systems of beliefs, but also the society's guiding system of values, from education to literature, politics and economics. Conversely, this essay aims at analyzing the two representative international novels of Raja Rao and Ignazio Silone within the mutual paradigm propounded by the anthropologist and macro-historian Riane Eisler (Eisler 1987, 1996, 2002, 2007) in order to go beyond the institutionalized politics of exclusion, domination and violence.

The "partnership" model is a way of relating to "Others" more holistically and equitably, as opposed to the "dominator" configurations[1] of the present-day forms of power-structures and hegemonic binary systems in which rigid top-down hierarchies, authoritarianism and aggressive supremacy prevail. More interestingly, within literary criticism, it forms the basis for a democratic appreciation of different cultural literary traditions, which are seen in their

[1] I particularly refer to slavery, marginalized groups and communities, (neo)colonialisms, repressive regimes and many other brutally authoritarian configurations, which use violence to maintain the domination/control model and work against a more democratic, egalitarian, peaceful, caring and environmentally sustainable world.

dynamic encounter and in their overlapping, thus contributing to a more textured appraisal of the shared histories, national and local differences and cultural specificities of indigenous peoples.[2] Such a partnership approach also ensures a dialogic synergism to received dominator knowledge-systems, and works to both restore and preserve any indigenous agency. This partnership study of *Kanthapura* (1938) and *Fontamara* (1933) is built on the polyphonic voices of anti-colonial writers within the context of what Barbara Harlow terms "resistance literature" that is, creative and aesthetic genres animated by the imperatives of radical critique, political action and social change (Harlow 1987). The uniqueness of this literature, and in particular of both novels under scrutiny, lies in its shared common condition—that of the colonized soul. But it equally lies in the awakening of an indigenous consciousness, in which oppression and aggression have been experienced under the exploitation of the colonized nation's natural and human resources. Thus resistance literature draws attention to itself as a struggle against dominant forms of ideological and cultural productions. Here the writer reappropriates and refashions in different social and cultural contexts his/her own native heritage by rewriting the conventions of representing his/her colonized identity. This partnership study therefore intends to articulate a trans-national space within (neo)colonial and native encounters in which the indigenous people depicted in both novels can not only be heard, but also given equal opportunity to shape—and reshape—the forms of power and government acting upon them as they project a genuine resistance to the lies and violence of dominator systems and colonial barbarity.

Raja Rao's novel begins with the description of the village of *Kanthapura* in the elephant-haunted valleys of the Himavathy's blue waters, located in the province of Kara. A village that, according to the usual Anglo-French imperial discourse, is supposed by many scholars to be the quintessential unit of many other South Indian villages, which have remained characterized by almost self-sufficient and self-governing communities. Conversely, as Inden has aptly argued:

> [...] the constitution of India as a land of villages was also due to the efforts of the British to deconstitute the Indian state. As they were composing their discourses on India's villages, they were displacing a complex polity with an 'ancient' India that they could appropriate as an external appanage of a 'modern' Britain. The essence of the ancient was the division of societies into self-contained, inwardly turned communities consisting of cooperative communal agents. The essence of the modern was the unification of societies consisting of outwardly turned,

[2] For a discussion of the partnership paradigm as a literary critical model in "postcolonial" literatures, see Riem (2003a, 2003b, 2007) and Mercanti (2004, 2005, 2007, 2008).

> competitive individuals. Just as the modern succeeded the ancient in time, so the modern would dominate the ancient in space. (1990: 133)

The imperialistic discourse on Indian villages would thus work on the basis of the usual dichotomy drawn between the "ancient" (traditional/barbaric/caste-ordered) and the "modern" (capitalist/rational/state-ordered), still reiterated in most of the available criticism on both Indian history and literature. Let us briefly look at the usual assumption, propounded especially by Indian scholars such as A. R. Desai, of the Indian village as being the "atom" of Indian nationalism. When India was colonized by Britain—the emerging industrial giant of the world—the "traditional life" of Indian villages was completely disrupted by colonial exploitation and they underwent serious economic, social, political and ideological transformation. Moreover, as the impact of British politics and education initially remained confined to the upper strata of Indian society, the Indian masses were left isolated in their grievances without being actively involved in the nationalist battle for independence. Since the State did not exercise any fundamental influence on the social, ideological, economic and even administrative life of the village group, a national consciousness did not exist which would have brought Indians to see themselves as a single unit. As Desai insists, it is with the growth of capitalism and the gradual commercialization of agriculture fostered under British rule that the very basis of the Indian village communities radically changed:

> It destroyed the village self-sufficient economy and made village economy an integral part of a single unified Indian economy. It was this economic unification of India which became the objective material basis for the steady amalgamation of the disunited Indian people into a unified nation, for the growth of national sentiment and consciousness among them and for the rise and development of an all-India national movement for their political freedom, and social and cultural progress. (1998: 36)

Now, it could well be that Indian villages may not be rigidly viewed against Western "civil societies" as mere autocratic atoms, self-sufficient in their economy like little static republics, patriarchal in their governance and opposed to a "higher" Indian state considered "an artificial, disorganized, and unstable institution of personal aggrandizement and opulence" (Inden 1990: 134). But we could instead start to look at villages as "overlapping agents" and outwardly turned communities interacting with and reshaping one another, with their intertwining and interdependence of individuals. Also, the village is seen as the locale where caste—another essential institution of India—is not the only social paradigm. Accordingly, the villagers would not appear to be the strange sort of humans who are steeped in a "mystical world outlook" in which "the subtlety of the Gandhian thought and the complex political situation of the pre-independence era could be explained to the unlettered villagers only through

the legends and religious stories of gods" (Dayal 1991: 14).[3] We could instead, and more intelligently, assume, as Inden maintains:

> [...] politics is an aspect of, or a way of talking about, all human institutions and not the essence of one of them, the 'state' [...] More generally, we would be able to provide the bulk of the people of an ancient India with the possibility that they could have consciousness of themselves, of their community, and of the larger polity to which they belonged. (1990: 160)

From this major revision of a "traditional" idea of India set against the modern rational West—along with its "binary" struggle for Independence—we can acknowledge a more humanistic and "partnership"-based evaluation of those complex activities of India's rural political societies, which appear poetically portrayed in the "decision-taking community" of *Kanthapura*. Not an imagined homeland characterized by a "metaleptic" mind unconscious of its operations, but a lively community animated by its inner capacity to transform itself in the pursuit of human freedom and legitimacy of its country at large.[4] It is clear then that within this critical perspective the village and its inhabitants are not moved by purely immanent agents—such as the "state", the gods and goddesses or the caste-order—but they are actually acknowledged as the real protagonists of the Indian Independence movement: "under Gandhian leadership the downtrodden were able to advance their cause by adopting a position of superior morality—that of non-violence—in a situation in which the rich and powerful routinely deployed forms of violence that were now, under law, criminal acts" (Hardiman 2005: 50). A mass civil resistance and a prodigious social force that, with its practice of *Satyagraha*[5] (truth-force), *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *swadeshi* (non-cooperation), was not merely economic, but intensely political and spiritual.

Kanthapura is the story of a nationalist upsurge fused with traditional religious faith which comes during the thirties to a small South Indian village. Its community, like many other Indian villages, appears organized according

[3] Such statements are frequently made by many Indian scholars in most of Raja Rao's critical assessment, and they more or less commonly agree that "Raja Rao delves deep into that most irrational of minds—one dominated by myth and more attuned to archetypal convictions than to rational explanations" (Sankaran 1993: 34).

[4] However, as Ganesh Devy aptly observes, "the reason for this perpetual indeterminacy of the essential Indian village is that the variety is of such extraordinary magnitude that there can never be any single image of an Indian village that will hold true for the entirety of rural India" (Devy 2006: 2).

[5] *Satyagraha* is also translated as "grasping onto principles", for Gandhi assumed that behind any struggle lies the fundamental clash of differing "angles of visions" illuminating the same truth. Thus, *Satyagraha* becomes an enriching search for a broad solution which should satisfy both parties, a resolution that enhances both sides (*partnership*) instead of defending a narrow solution (*domination*).

to the traditional caste class-division, which determines the occupation of its members and divides them into a Brahmins', a Pariahs', a Potters', a Weavers' and a Sudras' quarter. Within this initial description of a seemingly static society, Raja Rao briefly hints at its economic activity, simply based on artisan life and agricultural work in the Santur Coffee Estate, the Kuppur Cardamon Estate and the many coconut gardens, rice and sugarcane fields. Kanthapura has no industry, no railway or bus station, and no police post. Yet, its peaceful life is not a static one, but is characterized by a variety of social activities originating from a conscious world outlook with its own native aesthetic, moral and social values and systems. Rituals like worshipping with *kumkum* and camphor, fasting, offering *betel* leaves and coconuts abound throughout the novel, thus highlighting the ethical sense and the human values of the villagers' world outlook. Festivals, *bhajans*, temple offerings and community dinners play a vital part in Kanthapurians' daily chores, regulated by the traditional method of accounting for time based on the lunar calendar, as in the long and poetic description of the beginning of the autumn season (*Kartik*):

> *Kartik* has come to Kanthapura, sisters—*Kartik* has come with the glow of lights and the unpressed footsteps of the wandering gods; white lights from clay-trays and red lights from copper-stands, and diamond lights that glow from the bowers of entrance-leaves; lights that glow from banana-trunks and mango twigs, yellow light behind white leaves, and green light behind yellow leaves, and white light behind green leaves [...]. (1997: 85)[6]

Similarly, this evocative passage of rural life where villagers bless the plough:

> 'Oh, tomorrow is the *rohini* star, and people will yoke their bulls to the plough' [...] 'Why, tomorrow, you rat of a woman' [...] 'Oh, Ohè, this morning the plough will be blessed' [...] and Weaver Chennayya rushes up and washes himself, and puts oil on his hair, and his wife goes to the backyard to pick flowers in the garden [...] And Priest Rangappa is heard to ring the bell in the sanctum, and all eyes grow dim and the eyelids droop and everyone says 'There, there the goddess is going to show her face' [...] Then Priest Rangappa lights the camphor and lifts it up to her jewelled face and takes it round her diamond-hands and ruby feet and then flowers quietly roll down her face, and they all say, 'There, she has sent us her blessings' [...] And even the bulls stand without waving their tails. And then Rangappa comes with a pot of holy water and splashes it now on this bull and now on that [...]. (1997: 114–16)

Kanthapurishwari Temple is the centre of the villagers' life along with the other temple on the Kenchamma hills dedicated to their presiding deity

6 The bibliographical citations of Raja Rao's novel are given according to the edition listed in the bibliography.

(*grama-devata*)[7], which protects every activity of life whether it be a marriage or a funeral, rains or famines, smallpox and cholera, and in sowing and harvesting. Esha Dey makes a questionable distinction between the archaic temple of the goddess symbolizing the "eternal agrarian existence" of the village and the Kanthapurishwari temple of recent construction. She maintains that "the hallowed timeless existence of Kenchamma is clearly conceived and presented as far above the blood and mire of the contemporary history which centres in the new temple" (1992: 32). Yet, to allow such a rigid clear-cut distinction would mean to dismiss the continuous intermingling of the spiritual and the political as it is shown in the song created by the women who cut the grass for their calves:

> 'Goddess, when the demon came to eat our babes and rape our daughters, you came down to destroy him and protect us. Oh, Goddess, destroy this Government' [...] and mowing the grass they sang:
> Goddess, Goddess, Goddess Kenchamma,
> The Mother-in-law has wicked eyes,
> And the Sister-in law has hungry stomach,
> Betel-nuts never become stone,
> And a virgin will never become pregnant,
> Red is the earth around the Goddess,
> For thou hast slain the Red-demon. (emphasis mine) (1997: 98)

Through their gylanic world-accepting presence,[8] the Goddess Kenchamma and the gods of Kanthapurishwari temple establish the mythical-religious background of the novel and firmly sustain Gandhian political action through the villagers' faith:

> Kenchamma is our goddess. Great and bounteous is she. She killed a demon ages, ages ago, a demon that had come to ask our young sons as food and our young women as wives. Kenchamma came from the Heavens—it was the sage Tripura who had made penances to bring her down—and she waged such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth, and that is why the Kenchamma Hill is all red [...]. (1997: 1–2)

Reminiscent of the caring and supportive female force of the Goddess Kenchamma (*amma*, "mother", a suffix with several semantic nuances referred to the Great Goddess) is Achakka, an archetypal village grandmother to whom

[7] The Goddess Kenchamma's authority is confined to the village and she is powerless outside her own territory, like in the neighbouring Talassana village whose presiding goddess was Talassanamma.

[8] The term "gylany" coined by Riane Eisler hints at a peaceful cohesive model, which used to be the predominant paradigm of pre-neolithic societies. Yet today it is still active in a few traditional communities of the Indian subcontinent. Here, especially, the goddess is the symbol of a life-affirming and world-accepting religion rather than of a world-renouncing one.

Rao assigns the task of garrulously narrating "the sad tale of her village" whilst remaining in the background. Her fluid *sthala purana* narration is a continuation in English prose of the time-honoured native tradition of the folk epic. It is a narration so uniquely woven with the factual, the mythical and the poetical vision of *Kanthapura*'s dramatic events that we are gradually pulled into a complex matrix. This matrix is Rao's creative synthesis, radiating at multiple levels—the mythic experience, the spiritual transformation of the villagers and their political struggle with both the "external colonizer"; and the internal corruption of the village which embraces the problems of marriage, dowry, widows, caste and untouchability. Interestingly, it is from the Kanthapurishwari Temple that the central character of the novel, Moorthy, begins his religious and political activities and undergoes a personal awakening that will affect his entire community. Similarly, it is in front of the temple gods that the very vow of spinning, practising non-violence and of speaking the truth is to be sworn. It is in fact Moorthy, as the narrator points out, who discovers a "half-sunk *linga*" and along with some city boys they spontaneously put up a little mud wall and a tile roof, a small consecrated spot from which readings of *Shankara-Vijaya*, *Ganesh Jayanthi*, *harikathas* and other festivals, performances and ceremonies are regularly held. As the story progresses, the Moorthy initially depicted as "quiet, generous, serene, deferent[ial] and brahminic, a very prince" (1997: 5) gradually develops into a radical social reformer who incites the villagers to join Gandhi's *satyagraha* movement. Up to this point in the story, we have already come across a consistent amount of mythic lore made up of old tales and folk legends, which Rao conveniently uses to build the mythical dimension of the novel: the legend of the village goddess Kenchamma who waged the battle with the demon, the *Harikatha*-man, Jayaramachar, who tells the story of Shiva and Parvathi (as a mythical metaphor of India's enslavement by the devilish Red-man[9]), Damayanti and Shakunthala, the dominant myth of Rama-Sita and Ravana,[10] and how Krishna fought the serpent Kali and "so too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country" (1997: 12). We have thus learnt that Gandhi's *swaraj*, like the god Shiva, is three-eyed: "Self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, Khaddar" and we cannot but notice the continuous co-existence of religious and political strands, sometimes even merging together as in the slogans *Inqilab Zindabad*, *Gandhi Mahatma ki jai* and *Vande Mataram* (1997: 95) or in statements like "every promise before the

9 "Red-man" was a standard Indian colloquialism for the British due to their complexion, which appeared to Indians remarkably florid, far more red than white.

10 As Jasbir Jain observes, "The Ramayana is a story of a man who sustains personal values in a world seemingly hostile to them, a world where attempts are constantly made to dislocate order through power, temptation and ambition. It is the conduct of Rama which is central to the myth and this was the point which Gandhi emphasised." (2004: 28).

Congress is a promise before the Mahatma and God" (1997: 75). The figure of Gandhi is thus firmly established as an *avatar* of Shiva and along with this identification Moorthy becomes its microcosmic enactment:

> [...] the State of Mysore has a Maharaja, but that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London, and that one has another one in Heaven, and so everybody has his own Mahatma, and this Moorthy, who has been caught in our knees playing as a child, is now grown-up and great, and he has wisdom in him and he will be our Mahatma. (1997: 79)

This identification of Shiva, Gandhi and Moorthy is also congruously noticeable especially when the young Moorthy chants Shankara's "Sivoham, Sivoham, I am Shiva. I am Shiva. Shiva am I" (1997: 66–67) on the second day of his fast. After his moving meeting with Gandhi, "a vision of the Mahatma, mighty and God-beaming" (1997: 35) Moorthappa ("appa" means father, thus a way of addressing Moorthy with respect) returns to his village as a Gandhi-man and implores his community to remember that "whether Brahmin or bangle-seller, Pariah or priest they are all one as a mustard seed in a sack of mustard seeds, equal in shape and hue and all".

The mythical dimension of *Kanthapura*, a village now depicted in the streaming starlight as floating "like a night-procession of the gods over still waters [...] and as a wavering lantern light" (1997: 61), accompanies the economic and political changes which are shaping the villagers' Gandhian spirit.[11] In addition to the small contributions given by Kanthapurians for the celebration of festivals and monthly *bhajans*, Moorthy freely distributes spinning wheels (*charkhas*), explaining the economics of *khadi* amongst his community on behalf of the Congress, as subversive tools to counteract British rule:

> Because millions and millions of yards of foreign cloth come to his country, and everything foreign makes us poor and pollutes us. To wear clothes spun and woven with your own God-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to the workless, and work to the lazy. And if you don't need the cloth, sister—well, you can say 'Give it away to the poor,' and we will give it to the poor. Our country is being bled to death by foreigners. We have to protect our Mother. (1997: 17)

[11] However, as Paul Sharrad aptly points out, "change is more than a simple romance of village standing for nation and nation achieving autonomy and unity through Gandhian reform and noble resistance. The *Kanthapura* farm plots are taken over by urban industrializing Indians and Indian economics, irrespective of colonial rule, is already part of global circuits of capital and labour" (Sharrad 2005). For a detailed study of Indian nationalism and Raja Rao's fiction, also see Coppola (1980), Sethi (1999), Modal (2003), Mercanti (2006), Jain (2004, 2007) and Sarangi (2007).

The pitiless industrialization, particularly the Lancashire textile manufacturers, which reserved the Indian market for English machine-made cloth, and the other colonial economic policies of the British Empire—such as the new land revenue system, the colonial administrative and judicial systems[12]—deeply affected India's agrarian structure and impoverished the peasantry. The consequential poverty, famine and ever-increasing neglect of the landlords made village life particularly harsh and at times unbearable, as Raja Rao vividly shows in this passage about the migrant labourers working at the Skeffington Coffee Estate:

> Armies of coolies marched past the Kenchamma Temple, half-naked, starving, spitting, weeping, vomiting, coughing, shivering, squeaking, shouting, moaning, coolies—coolies after coolies passed by the Kenchamma Temple, the maistri before them, while the children clung to their mothers' breasts, the old men to their son's arms, and bundles hung over shoulder and arm and arm and shoulder and head [...]. (1997: 48)

As Bipan Chandra points out:

> [...] the colonization of the economy, administrative and legal structures [...] created a favourable economic and political climate for the village money-lender who began to occupy a dominant position in the rural economy and to expropriate both the peasant proprietors and the occupancy tenants and the zamindars. (2003: 339)

It is remarkable that Raja Rao conceives *Kanthapura* as a sensitive ground in which political slavery, economic exploitation and social backwardness are not seen merely as perpetrated by the colonizers, but also fostered by indigenous forces.[13] The violence of the coffee estate owner in forcing people to surrender their wives and daughters to him is a fitting example of the moral and physical oppression of the labourers, not to mention the policeman who rapes Puttamma and then is killed by her. Bhatta, *Kanthapura*'s first Brahmin, portrayed by Rao with sympathy and a touch of humanity, cheats people all the time in his priestly duties and uses his money as capital for his lending business and mortgaging of lands. In order to preserve his forms of subjugation, he

[12] As Desai maintains (1998: 30–50), the new land system eliminated the so-called *zamindar* system (the village as the unit of land assessment and revenue payment) and introduced a system of fixed money payment, assessed on land, to be paid in cash irrespective of the year's production. When a landholder could not pay the land revenue, he was constrained to mortgage or sell his land. Similarly, all land disputes, instead of being settled by the *panchayats* (village committees), were dealt with by the courts established by the centralized state.

[13] "Global industrialisation is already taking the potters off to tile factories, and the nationalist zeal of the villagers is founded largely on labour unrest amongst exploited coffee plantation workers brought in from another state" (Sharrad 2007: 220).

tries to oppose the Congress activities of the village supported by other wicked characters like Temple Rangappa, patwari Nanjundia, schoolmaster Devaraya and Rama and Subba Chetty. However, he fails miserably in his attempt to create a sort of Brahmin Party and when his true nature is exposed, he quietly leaves Kanthapura for Kashi where "for every hymn and hiccup you get a rupee" (1997: 190). Even the Swami of the village, Bhatta's mentor, makes use of the caste-system to "respect the ancient ways of our race, and not for all this Gandhi and Gindhi who cannot pronounce even a *gayathri*, and who says there is neither caste nor creed and we are all equal to one another [...]" (1997: 93). As M. K. Naik rightly points out "the struggle with the orthodoxy outside is bitter enough; but it is with the enemy within—the orthodoxy entrenched firmly in their hearts owing to centuries of tradition—that the new Gandhian has to fight a far more terrible battle" (1972: 62). Specifically, Moorthy, as a true follower of Gandhi, has to overcome his own prejudices before succeeding in uplifting the status of Kanthapura's untouchables. In fact, it is only much later in the story that he decides to go into a pariah hut, accompanied by a trembling fear and feeling so ill at ease:

> Moorthy thinks this is something new, and with one foot to the back and one foot to the fore, he stands trembling and undecided, and then suddenly hurries up the steps and crosses the threshold and squats on the earthen floor [...] 'Accept this from this poor hussy!' and slips back behind the corn-bins; and Moorthy says, 'I've just taken coffee, Lingamma...' but she interrupts him and says, 'Touch it, Moorthappa, touch it only as though it were offered to the gods, and we shall be sanctified'; and Moorthy, with many a trembling prayer, touches the tumbler and brings it to his lips, and taking one sip, lays it aside. (1997: 75–76)

This is a significant "passage" not only because Rao insightfully captures Moorthy's doubtful state of mind, but especially because the writer projects the painful rising strength of the individual self—what Gandhi called the soul-force—and it is this awareness that enables Moorthy to respond differently to the rigidity of the caste system's dictations. In this light, Gandhi's *swaraj* and *satyagraha*[14] become a political practice and the expression of a spiritual determination, both based on the individual's moral strength. Moorthy's personal defiance of caste orthodoxy is an assertion of his resistance towards authority and, in the broadest sense, a logical affirmation of peasant consciousness far removed from the one depicted by Hegel as "dream-like" or Marx as "primitive". Moorthy, like many other minor characters, is capable of a vast range of transformations that will also enable his community to act "within" the Gandhian resistance and react against social subjugation. Similarly,

[14] "Gandhi [...] posited an "alternative", not a "counter", modernity, a belief system, which was not dismissive of the emotion/mind combine, and demonstrated his modernity through flexibility of approach, openness of mind, willingness to step into other positions and foregrounding of the human" (Jain 2006: 37–38).

the village's women form a *Sevika Sangha* and dauntlessly commit themselves to the freedom movement, thus participating actively with their strength, enthusiasm and hope to the peasant insurgency. They do not remain trapped in the usually supposed "archaic" village shell, but emerge as courageous revolutionary "agents" capable of displaying all their spirit and energy. It is precisely this ability of Kanthapura's community, both men and women, to actively join the freedom struggle for independence that makes their political and spiritual revolt a deliberate and conscious experience. We first see Moorthy fighting with himself by undertaking fasts against violence, penances for self-purification, and praying for the regeneration of his entire village through his self-transformation. In this spiritual and political human revolution he is eminently practical: he organizes *pujas*, *harikathas*, *bhajans*, religious processions and conducts the picketing of *toddy* groves and shops as well as civil disobedience campaigns. Once he understands what Gandhi has preached and practised—an ongoing process of questioning and reformulation—and has awakened to the deep meaning of the non-violent path, he effectively conveys the spirit of *satyagraha* to his villagers. Although in the end the village will be destroyed by the Red-man's government, leaving "neither man nor mosquito", there will be something that has enriched the villagers' hearts, "an abundance like the Himavathy on Gauri's night, when lights come floating down" (1997: 188).

Raja Rao, as is amply shown in C. D. Narasimhaiah and M. K. Naik's critical essays,[15] has been deeply inspired by Ignazio Silone's *Fontamara*, which describes "the strange events" that took place in an old southern Italian village of the Marsica. Interestingly, both novels were first published abroad,[16] which makes *Fontamara* probably the most widely translated Italian novel, and *Kanthapura* one of the most successful Indian English novels of the pre-independence period, which surprisingly has not been translated into other Indian languages. The striking convergence of both novels is in the way they deal with the impact of colonialism(s) on indigenous people in which both Silone and Rao find projected not only a genuine resistance to the colonial barbarity, but also a distinctive revolutionary passion of their subjugated communities. Whereas in *Fontamara* the resistance of the community is directed against the fascist regime in Italy, in Rao's *Kanthapura* the Indian village reacts against the British government by joining the Gandhian struggle

15 See Narasimhaiah (2000) and Naik (1972).

16 *Fontamara*, first published in 1933, in a German translation by Nettie Sutro, did not appear in Italian until 1947 (Roma: Editrice Faro)—apart from a limited edition published in Paris in 1933 (Zürigo-Parigi: Nuove Edizioni Italiane), a British government edition replete with misprints issued to Italian prisoners of war in 1944, and several versions for publication in Ernesto Buonaiuti's Roman newspaper *il Risveglio* (1945)—whereas *Kanthapura* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938) was published in India only in 1947 for the Champak Library by the Oxford University Press.

for Independence, turning the nationalistic upsurge into a complex balance between traditional religious faith and politics that comes into conflict with the conservative orthodoxy of the villagers. Interestingly, these texts are connected on multiple levels: the historical events of the national growth of Italy and India (which took place between the two world wars); the challenge to the representation of colonial dominance as a virtuous and necessary "civilizing" task; the conflict between progressive socialist forces and the conservative orthodoxy within their rural communities, and the need to forge a language that successfully conveys the essential indigenous sensibility. *Kanthapura* and *Fontamara* are texts of community empowerment, both engaged in a resistance against a colonial system, which is confronted by both an extended and active violent opposition and a considerable internal struggle for self-determination. There is evidently a huge investment here by both Silone and Rao in researching, compiling and then making anew this anti-colonial experience into an imaginative form, which emerges as a genuine indigenous identity in its own right, rather than a minority or peripheral presence. In fact, whilst Silone devotes his writings to attacking fascism from a Socialist Christian perspective, Rao brings the English language and literature within the mainstream of India's linguistic, politico-spiritual and cultural tradition. Accordingly, time and place are remarkably nativized in ways rarely touched upon in Western literature: *Fontamara*, as Silone writes in his foreword, "is in striking contrast to the picturesque vision of southern Italy often conjured up in tourist literature [...] Its people dress like the poor do all over the world" (1994: 18). In *Kanthapura*, the past mingles with the present, and the gods and goddesses mingle with the people giving rise to endless legendary stories (*sthala purana*). *Fontamara*'s message is not "purely political and social" as M. K. Naik maintains (1972: 76), but also spiritual as the sacrificed character of the novel, Berardo, welcomes his painful death as an opportunity for Christian redemption. The fact of summarily contrasting these two novels by only highlighting the differences in their common tragic struggle against colonialism inevitably falls under suspicion. Even if in *Kanthapura*, religion constitutes the dynamic living tradition of the whole village, whereas in *Fontamara* the villagers become alienated by it instead, this does not mean that Silone's community has no spirituality and no chance of salvation. Silone indeed proposes the "imitation of Christ" as a natural religion—certainly not one revealed by the Church—but an organic spirituality grounded in the soil of human temperament. This particular narrative capturing Berardo's inner struggle whilst in prison is of such central significance to the novel that it needs to be quoted in full:

> 'If I turn traitor, everything is lost,' he said. 'If I turn traitor, Fontamara will be damned for ever. If I turn traitor, centuries will pass before such an opportunity occurs again. And if I die? ... I shall be the first peasant *to die not for himself, but for others*. For the other peasants. For the unity of the peasants.'

> *That was his great discovery*. That word seemed to lift the scales from his eyes, as if a brilliant light had suddenly been brought inside our cell.
>
> 'Unity,' he said. 'What is unity? Have you ever heard the word? It's a new word. Unity. That is solidarity. That is strength. That is, liberty. That is, land (rent-free!). Have you ever heard that word? Such a simple thing. You must take that word back to Fontamara. If I die'—he said to me—'you must tell them all [...] Unity. An end must be put to hatred between peasant and peasant. Away with hatred between peasants and workers. There's only one thing that we lack—unity. All the rest will come by itself.' [emphasis mine] (Silone 1994: 174).

It is through this inner dialogue of Berardo's that Fontamara's community engages itself in the struggle for justice against power. The solution to Fontamara's tragic end is thus profoundly spiritual, very much like the Kanthapurian Moorthy's *satyagraha*—another "great discovery"—and in the light of this evidence it is hard to agree with C. D. Narasimhaiah's remark that Silone's novel is characterized by:

> [...] the absence of a truly motivating, controlling, organizing point [...] It is not hard to imagine how a progressive writer in India of the thirties would have reacted to *Fontamara* where he would have looked for stimulus and what he could have imparted to his work as art and through it contemporary life. The answer is very likely to take a negative form. (2000)

Moving on to another striking example of indigenous self-determination and "international cultural partnership" is the way in which Silone and Rao have taken up, used and reshaped the "inherited" language. This has occurred as the colonialist's language inescapably imprisoned the colonized within the colonizer's conceptual paradigms, hence the rejection of a normative standard language and the re-definition of a distinctive medium of expression. Accordingly, in the depiction of village life, Ignazio Silone raises the question "in what language ought I to tell this story?" and warns the unwary: "To us Italian is a language learnt at school [...] It is a foreign language, a dead language, a language the vocabulary and the grammar of which developed without any connection with us or our way of behaving or thinking or expressing ourselves" (1994: 19). Similarly, Raja Rao discusses in his Foreword to *Kanthapura* the problem of Indians writing in English, specifically how to fuse the tempo of Indian thought and sensibility with the English expression. In *Kanthapura*, he expresses "Indian modes of feeling and expression" (Rao 1947: vi) through the creative use of a complex range of native lexical idioms enriched by both transpositions of lexical and syntactic models from one language to another and frequent loan translations.[17] Such linguistic indigenization of the English language shows how deeply culture-bound Rao's novels are, for a series of customs, habits,

[17] For a detailed study of Raja Rao's linguistic experiments, see Kachru (1983, 1989, 1996), Ram (1984), Ramaswamy (1992, 2007), Hardgrave *et al.* (1998), Mercanti (2008).

modes of behaviour and traditional narrative techniques have considerably found their way into Rao's native variety of Indian English. More specifically, in *Kanthapura*, Rao's intimate knowledge of south Indian rural life enables him to elevate the narration to further multiple planes, densely symbolic, and capable of powerful spiritual and political resonances with his country. Herein lies the affirming sign of India's linguistic and cultural traditions through which Rao "rewrites 'true' history as against the 'inauthentic' historical accounts compiled by Europeans, *and* a wresting of the 'nation' from the aggressor by means of a cultural revival effected through the use of indigenous themes and motifs" (Aikant 2007: 63).

As it has been demonstrated, the indigenous consciousness depicted in both novels expresses an "alterNative" discourse overcoming the master narrative of the dominator system by locating their stories on the following grounds: (1) a sense of community, a collective consciousness which becomes structurally central to the novel even when it portrays certain individuals; (2) the choice to integrate native traditions, folklore, orality and myth as a mode of narration distinctly Indigenous ("archetypal") in form and pattern; (3) the nativization of the colonial language by using the language and idiom of the villagers in order to set the atmosphere and mood of the novel and to also emphasize the continuity of the indigenous tradition; (4) a complex and heterogeneous treatment of colonialism in terms of its local reverberations in the indigenous community, that is an external dominance imposed by the colonizer and an internal conservative "orthodoxy" within the community (i.e. the organized religion in *Fontamara* and the superiority of Brahminical caste in *Kanthapura*).

While *Kanthapura* and *Fontamara* have flourished particularly during the thirties as a political medium to counteract colonialism, they have also allowed the continuity of indigenous traditional resonances up until the present. It is a transmission of a mixed cultural heritage both indigenous and colonial (south Indian/English in *Kanthapura* and the southern *cafoni*/modern townsfolk in *Fontamara*), which holds not only the infinite possibility for cross-cultural understanding, but also displays the healing and communicative capacities of a truly artistic work. By comparing these two novels we have been able to access the vast repository of human potential which the writer expresses with his fullest voice, sometimes venturing far and wide to gather sources most suited to his needs. These novels do not combine the classic dichotomy between colonizer/colonized, civilized/primitive, ancient/modern, materialistic/spiritual, but instead accommodate a vision of the "Indigenous" and the "colonial" that is not necessarily uniform and monolithic. There is a constant negotiation between the horror and sufferings of colonialism that also gives expression to a voice of hope, in the awareness of a never forgotten past, and in the quest for a viable transformation. Hence the urgent need to concentrate on the working together

of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together as envisaged in the kind of interdependence and mutual coexistence[18] inherent in Riane Eisler's partnership model, which prevents our analysis from representing indigenous communities merely as impoverished and constrained eternal victims within dominator systems.

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[18] As Riane Eisler aptly maintains, the term partnership does not simply refer to strategic alliances or cooperation as people also collaborate and cooperate in the domination model. The difference between competition and cooperation does not lie in the difference between these two models, but in their different cultural configuration.

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15

A Green Postcolonial Reading of *Kocharethi* and *Mother Forest*

TOM THOMAS
St. Thomas College, Kozhencherri, Kerala, India

This chapter, based on the premise that postcolonialism and eco-criticism, have a great deal to gain from one another. It spells out some of the obvious differences between the two critical schools, search for grounds that allow a productive overlap between them and define "green postcolonialism". The chapter then attempts a comparative green postcolonial reading of the first novel in Malayalam by an *adivasi*/tribal, namely Narayan's *Kocharethi* (1998) and *Mother Forest* (2004), the autobiography of the adivasi/tribal activist C. K. Janu. This juxtaposition raises vital questions regarding the postcolonial plight of the indigenous people of Kerala. The legacy of colonial modernity, language, education, nationalism, gendered subalternity, cultural history and ecopolitics is examined within the framework of green postcolonialism, thereby indicating the moral urgency for a fruitful alliance between the two critical schools of postcolonialism and eco-criticism to envision an alternative future.

The changes associated with globalization have led to the rapid extension and intensification of capital along with an accelerated destruction of the environment and a growing gap between the rich and the poor. This has had a significant impact on the terrain in which postcolonialism and eco-criticism operate. While both eco-criticism and postcolonialism are committed to locating the text in the world, they conceive of both world and text in radically different ways. In keeping with a commitment to recognize the land as more than a backdrop—a picture and a story in which humans participate along with other life forms—ecocritical conceptions of the world tend to privilege non-urban settings in which those other life forms predominate. Postcolonial criticism tends to envision the world through urban eyes—an obvious historical explanation for this being the arrival of Third World intellectuals in the metropolitan centres of the First World.

Postcolonial theory has frequently asserted the value of positionality in order to foreground the politics of discursive authority. Positionality has generally been thought to include race, gender, sexuality and class, but has more recently come to include geographical and biotic space. In an era of increasing ecological degradation, the mutually constitutive relationship between social inequity and environmental problems has become more stark and vivid.

If pressing environmental crises have spurred the development of environmental criticism in literary studies, the increasing awareness of how such crises have impacted—and will continue to disproportionately impact—the vulnerable populations of the postcolonial world, has made the nexus between postcolonialism and eco-criticism a particularly urgent area of study. Yet, this intersection is fraught with danger. Eco-criticism has been developed primarily from the perspective of Western critics using Anglo-American literature, and has often worked from assumptions, common in Western environmental movements, which are extremely problematic in postcolonial contexts.

Different conceptualizations of individual places extend to different ways of conceiving the relationship between the local and the global. While stressing locale-specificity, eco-criticism gains its global focus by encompassing the very earth it studies. Postcolonialism also recognizes the interplay between the local and the global, but in a more cautious, indirect way. Wary of the ideological and material implications of globalizing impulses, postcolonialism admits the force of the global in a way that explicitly prohibits its reduction into a formula that confirms the place of the individual in a universal order, either of nature or culture. The global and the local come together, not by the way of simple synecdoche, or the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm, but in a way such that each interrupts and distorts the other, thereby refusing the possibility of concrete or abstract global belonging (O'Brien 2001: 142).

Rob Nixon points out four main schisms between the dominant concerns of postcolonialists and eco-critics. First, postcolonialists have tended to foreground hybridity and cross-acculturation. Eco-critics, on the other hand, have historically been drawn more to discourses of purity: virgin wilderness and the preservation of "uncorrupted" last great places. Second, postcolonial writing and criticism largely concern themselves with displacement, while environmental literary studies tend to give priority to the literature of place. Third, and in a related context, postcolonial studies have tended to favour the cosmopolitan and the transnational. Nixon asserts that postcolonialists are typically critical of nationalism, whereas the canons of environmental literature and criticism have developed within a national (and often nationalistic) American framework (2006: 235).[1] Fourth, postcolonialism has devoted

[1] The study of literature as if the environment mattered seems to be an unassailable who's who of American nature writing: Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo

considerable attention to excavating or reimagining the marginalized past—history from below and border histories—often along transnational axes of migrant memory. By contrast, within much environmental literature and criticism, something different happens to history. It is often repressed or subordinated to the pursuit of timeless, solitary moments of communion with nature (ibid.).

Attempts to distinguish between postcolonialism and eco-criticim are always likely to be perilous; and it is against this uncertain historical background that green postcolonialism has made its recent entrance into the critical-theoretical fray. "What is green postcolonialism?" Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin provisionally define the field in terms of "those forms of environmentally-oriented postcolonial criticism which insist on the factoring of cultural differences into both historical and contemporary ecological and bioethical debates" (2007: 9). Differentiated experiences of colonialism provide the main historical link here. They also point out a continuing environmentalist insufficiency of postcolonial literary and cultural texts, which also works the other way round with "postcolonial" eco-criticism serving to highlight the work of non-European authors or critiquing the Euro-American biases of certain versions of environmentalist thought (ibid.).

Both fields articulate historically situated critiques of capitalist ideologies of development. They also combine a political concern for the abuses of authority with an ethical commitment to improving the conditions of the oppressed. Green postcolonialism brings out a truism that clearly applies to, but is not always clearly stated in, the different strands of both postcolonialism and eco-criticism: no social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice—for all ecological beings—no justice at all.

Postcolonial criticism, despite what might still be seen as an unduly anthropocentric bias, offers a valuable corrective to a variety of universalist ecological claims—the unexamined claim of equivalence among all "ecological beings", irrespective of material circumstances and the peremptory conviction, itself historically conditioned, that global ethical considerations should override local cultural concerns (Huggan 2004: 720).

Subaltern Studies as history from the lower rungs of society is marked by a freedom from the restrictions imposed by the nation-state. Gramsci speaks of the subaltern's incapability to think of the nation. Once it becomes possible for the subaltern to imagine the state, he transcends the conditions of subalternity. A consciousness of subject positions and voices can re-empower languages, deconstruct histories and create new texts of more dense dialogical accomplishment. Part of the project of postcolonial theory would be to push

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Leopold and Rachel Carson. Initial efforts were limited to the personal narratives of the Anglo-American nature writing tradition—or to one physical landscape—the ostensibly untrammelled American wilderness. For further details, see Hicks (2006: 202–22).

literary texts into this shifting arena of discursiveness, thus enabling new strands of counter-narratives and counter-contexts to shape themselves and complicate binarist histories. But polysemic, anticolonial subjectivities and their energies, which defy the definitions of the colonizer, are muted and translated into a monolithic national identity, articulated in the rhetoric of "Nationalism" in *Kocharethi*, a Malayalam novel on the Malayaraya tribe by Narayan (1998).

Kocharethi

The tribals of Kerala are never identified as "Malayalis". Unique in themselves, their lifestyles and languages are significantly different from those of the mainstream. Narayan's *Kocharethi*, the first novel in Malayalam by an adivasi, is a historical intervention where, far from being the objects of history, the adivasis become its subjects.

Narayan, himself a Malayaraya, does not attempt to depict the historical or mythical spheres of the tribal experience. Instead, he unravels fifty or sixty years entwined with his own life situations. He deftly challenges the incorrect representations of the adivasis in contemporary cinema, television and publications. The life described in the novel, with all its rituals, ceremonies, customs, faith, institutions of marriage, food, clothing and shelter, recalls the period prior to the Renaissance in Kerala.[2] Man's raw encounter with the forces of nature is vividly portrayed. The forest is not only life-generating, but also life-consuming.

Kocharethi is a brilliant account of the life and nature of the Malayaraya tribe. Marriages occurred between cousins. Women were in charge of their sexuality. They always carried sickles and were not hesitant about killing anyone who molested them. However, if they would be unsuccessful, they would end their lives with the very same sickles.

The arrival of colonial modernity converted forests into reserved forests and plantations. Destruction of the old order and the onset of a new one created

[2] The social reformer Sree Narayana Guru (1855–1928) is celebrated as the Father of Kerala's Renaissance. In 1888, after a long period of education, wide range of travel and meditation, Sree Narayana Guru installed a Shiva idol at a place called Aruvipuram in southern Kerala. This date is designated as the founding date of Kerala's Renaissance. The Renaissance set in motion a wide range of people's movements against the hierarchical caste system and for the modernization of the feudal conservative society.

While in the West the Renaissance happened at a point in time when Enlightenment lay in the future and the consequent scientific spirit was yet to become the driving force of the intellectual ferment, India had to confront the discourses of rationality now on the ascendant in the context of colonial modernity. Kerala's Renaissance, in this sense, is more indebted to the Enlightenment modernity than Renaissance values of revival of classical learning.

an identity crises among the tribals of this region. So long Kochuraman, the "medicine-man", had always used animal fat to treat ailments. But now he resorts to soda-water and moves to the medical college for treatment. The nuances of this transition in the life of the Malayaraya tribe are poignantly captured by Narayan.

The feudal landlord, the king and the British Raj are symbols of the various stages of this transition. The oppressive powers of nascent laws and authority perplex and terrify the tribals. Apart from nature, "humans" also torture them. The Malayarayas were cheated in prices and weights of their forest produce when the currencies and measures changed over to the British system. This exploitation by "civil society" forced them to search for education. Kochupillai, the teacher, leads them into the light of letters. The dream of a government job, migration into the city, love-marriages all follow. Christian proselytizations also occur, creating a hybid of "New Christians"—always prefixed by the term "arayan".

The action of *Kocharethi* takes place at the fag end of this phase, in the early half of the twentieth century. It encloses a space of transition from the colonial to the postcolonial within the imagined boundaries of the nation-state. Thus, situated in a later milieu of Indian history, *Kocharethi* in a way addresses the questions of acculturation and education of the subaltern—in short, of the subaltern's translation as "appropriation". Education as a necessary ploy for moulding homogeneous identities came packaged with the label promising equality and liberty. But the subaltern aspires to education in order to be liberated from the land and its woes. *Kocharethi* is filled with the new subaltern dream of a government job. Narayan makes a feeble attempt to parody this process of "modernizing" the tribal. But the novel fails in demarcating a political position opposing colonial modernity (Pillai 2004: par.13).

Kocharethi reveals the slow acculturation of the native into the economy, culture and politics of the nation-state. The native in *Kocharethi* falls prey to the project of colonial modernity, which the new Indian state sets out to continue in order to prove its capability to self-rule. *Kocharethi* depicts the plight of the native subaltern caught in the regulative politics of the infallible nation-state, and betrayed by the unfulfilled promise of participatory citizenship, struggling to find voice amidst the homogenized babel of nationalist discourses. State hegemony, nationalist ideology, dominant language and cultural interpellation, all collude to construct the native of *Kocharethi* as a passive subject (ibid.: par. 16).

Kocharethi embraces and enhances the task of colonial modernity to instil middle-class values and bourgeois virtues into the gendered subaltern subject. The new woman, conscious of her identity, has at the same time lost her roots. As Parvathy, the educated subaltern migrates to the city, the narrative, in an allegorical twist, leaves Kochuraman and Kunjipennu stranded in a government

hospital at the mercy of state welfare aid. Thus one sees the articulation of gender being translated into a different idiom by the interventions of the modern state. Narayan assumes a nationalist identity by which he sees education of subaltern women as necessary, but not at the cost of losing the essence of their "femininity" and "culture". The women of *Kocharethi* have no role in the struggle for independence. As Parvathy inhabits the secure space of her home, Madhavan and his comrades go out into the public domain to free the nation, thus lending their subaltern identities to structure the hegemony of a patriarchal nationalist culture.

Meena T. Pillai points out that a close reading of *Kocharethi* reveals the nuances through which gender and ethical relations become inextricably linked to the formation of the Indian state (ibid.: par. 22). The novel provides a framework to picture the formation of India as a sovereign, socialist, democratic republic, where native and gender identities are subsumed and tokenized to strengthen the unifying logic of the nation.

Language is a fundamental site of struggle in subaltern discourses, resisting translation because colonization begins in language. The evident pull towards colonial modernity and nationalist themes in *Kocharethi* is found in its language too, which is very near to standard Malayalam, the disjunctions being minimal. There is no attempt to capture the linguistic and cultural ethos of the language of the Malayaraya tribe (ibid.: par. 23). The subaltern community in *Kocharethi*, having lost its language by translation and co-option into the dominant discourse, has also lost the power to name. Parvathi, Madhavan, Narayanan—all names of upper caste Hindu gods—speak of the silencing of a culture. A community devoid of its language is a community devoid of dignity.

Kocharethi is a giving in, a passive surrender to the larger history of the nation-state (ibid.: par. 26). In postcolonial parlance, to have a history is to have a legitimate existence, but the text denies itself in this legitimacy of being. In *Kocharethi* the subaltern is deftly muted by the dominant discourse. The discourse of the colonial modernity and the nation-state that one finds in *Kocharethi* co-opts the native and re-fashions him/her according to the norms of the dominant culture. Subaltern translations of the idiom of the nation and nationalism thus become acts of cultural displacement. Claiming the nation in the language also means being claimed by the nation.

Mother Forest

> [...] no one knows the forest like we do, the forest is mother to us, more than a mother because she never abandons us. (Bhaskaran 2004: 5)

The Life Story of "C. K. Janu", is an oral life history, transmitted through a mediator and illustrates the efforts of the non-literate or non-literary to tell her story. This text provides an opportunity to explore how a woman views herself and how her self-perceptions have in turn affected the choices she has made in her life.

Janu, is a tribal activist who wages bitter struggles against the government for the land rights of tribal groups. She received no formal education, but became actively involved in the literacy campaign in Kerala and learned to read and write, proving herself to be a natural leader. Her work focuses on the promotion and defense of human rights, peace activism and the demands of the landless tribal people of Kerala. She was part of the three-member delegation from India on a European tour organized by the Global Action Group and the lone representative from India at a conference in Geneva organized by the United Nations in 1999, as well as an active participant in the second Global Action Group conference held at Bangalore in 2000. By sharing her own vision of survival and ideas on the strategies to achieve positive development, she is serving as a voice for her community, which has been silenced for centuries. In her autobiographical narration, Janu gives a passionate account of her struggle to get back the lands of which they were dispossessed. Without any means of earning a proper livelihood, her people fear that they risk losing their identity also.

The forest meant everything to the tribal groups. Janu speaks of her childhood and her life in the forest, then as a maid in a teacher's home. Her involvement in the literacy programme and other social activities led to her political awakening. She became a worker for the Communist Party, but was soon disillusioned by the party's hidden agendas and attitude towards her community. She is well aware of the fact that forest flower beetles cannot argue with city microphones that make great noise, but she will fight unto death for the restoration of the rights of her people. Her narration is an eloquent testimonial to her convictions and courage in mobilizing a protest against the government to restore the alienated land to the tribal people, enabling them to regain their sense of identity.

The first part of the book deals with her inner world and conjures a holistic worldview where nature and human co-mingle. The sights of the forest—the hills catching fire, rains falling "like a woman with her hair shorn, the wild water all blood-red gushing angrily" (2004: 2), the depth and beauty of darkness and moonlight, flowers blossoming—are all enthralling. But the sights of civilization like *Vellamunda* with "unfamiliar pathways, strange hills and little streams and fields with strange-looking ridges that did not look like ours" (ibid.: 7) are disturbing. The forest is never quiet. Streams are always gushing, the woods mumble, winds howl, frogs croak and creatures cry.

The tribal instruments *chini* and *thudi* create their own distinctive notes. But "civil society" has its radios, motor pumps, loudspeakers and schoolchildren to offset this harmony. The smell of virgin earth coupled with that of hunger dominates the forest. Janu remembers vividly that when her mother used to come and visit her in *Vellamunda* "she brought the smell of our huts with her" (ibid.: 12). "The earth has different smells in different seasons" (ibid.: 13) and gives out its scent only when worked upon. Again "culture" with its chemicals, church fumes, clothes and vehicles is nauseating.

More than thirty different kinds of plants, crops and fruits are mentioned. Rice, *kappa, chena, kachil, karappayam, mothangappayam,* honey, tubers, banana are some of them. Keeping them company is the animal life—insects, fish, crabs, snakes, elephants, pigs. The lifestyle described is always full of activity. Rest seems to be unknown. The very first paragraph describes around twenty different activities. Here is a single sentence describing work: "Only after sowing germinating tilling transplanting weeding watering standing guard reaping carrying threshing and making mounds of grain would the *jenmi* make his appearance" (ibid.: 15).

The sentences in the first chapter do not start with capitals. Upper cases appear only when an item from "civil society" is mentioned, for example "Dhotis and Shirts" (ibid.: 5). Even "i" is in the lower case—a technique to indicate holism and dwarf anthropocentrism. Commas are absent between varied items signifying that dualities are insignificant as in "carrying dung to the fields digging up the soil with spades sowing pulling out the seedlings transplanting them weeding watering reaping carrying the sheaves of corn and such" (ibid.: 1). Here language does not merely reflect reality, but also actively creates it. Lives are strongly interlinked with nature, the earth and the trees.

There was no formal education system; the forest was everything—guide, guardian and philosopher. Slowly, there came people to take the children to tribal hostels. Janu's sister was one of them. The conditions of these residential schools and hostels were terrible. They were unclean and lacked buildings, water and electricity. There were no proper toilets or bathrooms. Food and uniforms were rarities. Seeping sewage water invited diseases. The government never cared for the adivasi children.

The narration may be in a "prelapsarian" tongue, very different from what academic establishments expect for a life narration. Such life narrations may be hard to identify with for those who have not suffered (Menon 2006: par. 16). Janu's autobiographical narration, presented as an extended conversation with an editor, conveys her lack of compromise in her assertions. The shifts in tone, pauses or changes in diction reflect her refusal to erase the inevitable gaps and fissures of the actual narrative events. She is not positioned as a cultural icon, but as an ordinary individual with strong communal feelings (ibid.: par.17).

This narration boldly resists "taken for granted" attitudes towards these neglected segments of the population and speaks for them. Thus they make an effort to locate themselves as a subject, rejecting the object status to which cultural identities have confined them. The text illustrates the need for a revisionary method of reading the discourses of people regarded as marginal to the dominant literary tradition. It also compels one to reassess the psychological simplicity attributed to marginalized groups.

The autobiographical narration of Janu is not merely a retrospective summation of past events and experiences. She genuinely wishes to change the condition of the community to which she belongs. She is also aware of her limitations in face of the power plays of a manipulative society. Her narration ends with a desire to know herself more. She wishes to position herself in a more liberated future, not only for her own individual benefit, but for the welfare of her community as a whole.

The story of Janu acknowledges that each aspect of reality is gendered. She often reminds the readers that within women's experiences there are a variety of subject positions and voices to be heard and represented. Hers is a humble attempt to evolve a subaltern essence. It brings an anonymous collectivity to the front of the stage, with great courage, no longer assuming the role assigned to them, but asserting their own right to a voice and a part in the action, which deviates from a culturally intelligible fixed object position, purposefully locating themselves as subjects and revolutionizing earlier autobiographical writing norms, demanding attention and respect.

Development paradigms and development goals, which lead to the management of natural resources without the participation and consent of the natural resource communities, have to be vehemently criticized. Mainstream right /left political parties do not address the concerns of the communities facing social and market exclusions by neo-liberal economic policies. Thus, a subaltern eco-politics wakes up in its stead. The adivasi is represented as one who is "unable to speak" and who is to be benevolently "rehabilitated", "protected", "developed" and slowly "integrated" into civil society. This representation as a people without voice silences them. Hence, if an adivasi like Janu speaks, it cannot be her voice, but someone else's from outside! Orientalist stereotyping on the one hand portrays them as innocent, naïve, nature loving, uncorrupted by modernity, and on the other hand as immoral drunkards and wretched living beings. The adivasi is thus an eternal "other", defencelessly marginalized and unrepresentable. The monolithic representation of adivasis distorts their plurality and prevents the expression of their anxieties. While migrant land encroachments are "natural" and "legitimized", the adivasi struggle becomes "unnatural" and "criminal".

Janu is a symbol that defies conventional right/left dichotomies. For her, the personal indeed becomes the political. No political history of Kerala can now

be written bypassing her. She disturbs us. Nature cannot be mystically revered when dalits and adivasis are shot dead, nor can one be slaves to revolutionary principles that hide casteist ecological implications. It is only Janu's realm of adivasi/dalit/green/feminist politics that can problematize caste, tribe, gender, class and ecological parameters. She has helped redefine the concept of an adivasi from "simple", "helpless", "illiterate", and "uncivilized" into one ready to struggle for the basic rights to live.

Thus, reading *Kocharethi* and *Mother Forest* within a green postcolonial framework raises a lot of vital questions regarding the plight of Kerala's indigenous people in a postcolonial nation. It also indicates the moral urgency for a fruitful alliance between the two critical schools of postcolonialism and eco-criticism to envision an alternative future.

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16

Carib Palimpsests in Derek Walcott's *Collected Poems*

Kerry-Jane Wallart
Université Paris IX–Dauphine, France

Hovering both as a presence and an absence, Amerindian cultures have been haunting the Americas ever since their "discovery" by the Europeans. This is especially true of the Caribbean islands, where the indigenous tongues—Carib, Arawak or otherwise—have all but disappeared to the profit of European languages, or rather of what came to be known under the name of Creoles. In their diverse ways, Caribbean authors all register the death of the original tongues spoken on their islands, writing what may be read as linguistic thanatographies. In their work, patches of the original Caribbean languages remain not as strata, but as insertions, almost as anomalies; they survive as though they were a foreign language, in mentions that almost would, and sometimes do, deserve italics. Among the postcolonial literatures, the Caribbean seems to share a sad singularity with the Irish and just a few others. Beneath layers of alienating European culture, there remains nostalgia for a lost tongue, which could only be understood by the oppressed and be used as a means to resist; there is no secret idiom left, only ways to "signify".[1] The landscape has turned mute or

[1] For the "trope" of signifying, see Abrahams (1970), Spitherman (1977) and Gates Jr. (1989: 235–76). Abrahams defines "signifying" thus:

"Signifying seems to be a Negro term, in use if not in origin. It can mean any of a number of things; in the case of the toast about the signifying monkey it certainly refers to the trickster's ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or situation. Also it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures. Thus it is signifying to stir up a fight between neighbors by telling stories; it is signifying to make fun of a policeman by parodying his motions behind his back; it is signifying to ask for a piece of cake by saying, 'my brother needs a piece of cake'."

else singularly cryptic, with just a few hieroglyphs here and there testifying to the "devouring" of an entire culture:

> [...] a faith, infested, cannibal,
> which eats gods, which devoured
> the god-refusing Carib, petal
> by golden petal, then forgot,
> and the Arawak
> who leaves not the lightest fern-trace
> of his fossil to be cultured
> by black rock. ("Air", *The Gulf and Other Poems, Collected Poems*, 1986: 114)[2]

Here the disjointed syntax, the run-on lines, the epiphrases, the piling up of relative clauses, all mimic the unravelling of an original language. The aim of this chapter is to explore the modes of such spectral tribal identity and to read it as the symptom not of a (post)modern loss of meaning, but much rather of a strategy of superimposition. If one's language has become that of the other ("parroting our master's /style and voice, we make his language ours/converted cannibals"; "Crusoe's Journal", *The Castaway and Other Poems, Collected Poems,* 1986: 93), palimpsestual transpositions and translations do create a word that is at once that of the Empire and of its subversion. To make another one's language ours means to adopt it and to adapt it. One could note here that the word palimpsest also refers to a plaque that has been turned around and whose back has been engraved. Derek Walcott's poetry is about such tension, about such revolution, in the original sense of the word. Palimpsests will then be understood in this chapter as a literary strategy of accumulation, but also of reversal, of contradiction, of opposition.

The disappearance of the Indian languages,[3] in Derek Walcott's *Collected Poems*, gives way to a reverie around the idea of erasure, of deletion, of

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If this quotation concerns itself with the Black American culture in the USA, it holds just as true for the Caribbean zone.

2 References to poems from Derek Walcott's *Collected Poems 1948–1984* (1986) will be made in the following fashion: ("Poem Title", *Collection Title*, *Collected Poems*, page number).

3 Mainly that of the Arawak, or the "island Carib" (a misnomer, since both languages share no common origin whatsoever); indeed, when, shortly before the European colonization, the Caribs invaded some of the West Indies islands, they are believed to have killed the men and taken the women as wives. The latter taught their own language to their children, so that the Carib disappeared to the profit of the Arawak (hence the idea that there was one language for men and another one for women). Arawak was spoken until the 1920s in remote areas of Dominica, Saint Vincent and Trinidad. It is now entirely extinct, even though it gave birth to the language of the "Black Caribs", or "Red Caribs", who mainly live in Honduras and Belize and speak "Garifuna". As for Carib, it is still spoken in Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil, and from the 25 to 40 dialects that there were, 20 to 30 still exist.

obliteration, of the conscious suppression of an idiom and the culture that goes with it. Thus, a word of resistance has also been nipped. Of Friday when Crusoe set foot on his island and set about to enslave him, Walcott writes: "what he cried is lost" ("Crusoe's Journal", *The Casteaway and Other Poems, Collected Poems*, 1986: 93). Dactyl and iamb evoke here a cycle of plenitude and loss while the present tense ("is") stages a vivid loss, one that is still being experienced. This is a language that was never registered, that has lost all momentum and that is only vaguely to be recorded by poets. Instead, just as in Saint-John Perse's poem "Le Perroquet" (Perse 1982: 16), Friday finds himself compelled to learn and adopt, as his only tongue, that of his British master: "parroting our master's/style and voice, we make his language ours, /converted cannibals" ("Crusoe's Journal", *ibidem*). This theme mingles well with ideas of the unsayable, meaning, among other things, the genocide of the Indians. In his "Second Journey" of *Language and Death,*[4] Giorgio Agamben ponders over the poem "Eleusis" written by the young Hegel in 1796 as a tribute to Holderlin. Here he talks not only of the ineffable, the dark part of life in front of which language is inadequate, but where he also describes language as necessarily eaten away by negativity: such a post-modern doubt will almost be erased by the *Phenomenology*, it will be all but explained away by the system (Agamben 1982/1991). Language, in Walcott's poetry, is this hollow shell, it has lost the substance that only the original tongues could boast.

However, such loss is not always deemed as final as it seemed in the first quotation ("not the lightest fern-trace"):

> [...] and the lost Arawak hieroglyphs and signs
> were razed from slates by sponges of the rain,
> their symbols mixed with lichen. ("Another Life", 8, *Collected Poems*, 1986: 196)

The etymology of lichen is ancient Greek *leichein*, to lick, sending us back once more to themes of tongues, in both a literal and a figurative meaning of the word. The terms used here ("hieroglyphs", "signs", "symbols") counter the colonial ideology, one according to which the native languages were rough and uncouth. Thus, in a play by Derek Walcott, Sir Walter Raleigh comically declares upon first catching a glimpse of Guyana: "You can discern the black leaves of a forest so far translated into no civilized tongue".[5] The poet develops the idea according to which those languages, more sophisticated than the European prejudice has it, are still there, fixed and hieratic as petroglyphs, intimating their not-quite death, standing in for their own tombstones. The whole elemental world, a central one in these poetics, is said to speak

[4] See Agamben (1982, 1991).

[5] Walcott (2002: 188). We shall come back to this idea of "translation", which is, after all, another prominent palimpsest.

this lost tongue ceaselessly, spanning over centuries of painful, alienating history and European occupation, pondering on the "natural idiom" that landscapes may utter:

> I bent towards what I remembered,
> all was inevitably shrunken,
> it was I who first extended my hand
> to nameless arthritic twigs,
> and a bush would turn in the wind
> with a toothless giggle, and
> certain roots refused English.
> But I was the one in awe.
> This was a new pain,
> I mean the mimosa's averring
> 'You mightn't remember me'. ("Another Life", 23, *Collected Poems*, 1986: 291–92)

As often, Derek Walcott plays on the double meaning of words, punning on the roots of plants and words alike ("certain roots refused English") even as nature is shown to be accusing the poet of having forgotten her Amerindian designation. Poetry is often likened, in *Collected Poems*, to nature, to its winds and sands, in a pre-Saussurean dream, which would erase the chasm between the signified and the signifier:

> I seek
> As climate seeks its style, to write
> Verse crisp as sand, clear as sunlight,
> Cold as the curled wave, ordinary
> As a tumbler of island water. ("Islands", *In a Green Night, Collected Poems*, 1986: 52)

> [...] hewing a prose
> as odorous as raw wood to the adze;
> out of such timbers
> came our first book. ("Crusoe's Journal", *The Castaway and Other Poems, Collected Poems*, 1986: 92)

In this closeness between language and nature, one in which he sees the last traces of Indian tongues, the poet stages a remembrance of words, of idioms past and which might never have been spoken. They are a dream, a poet's fantasy of correspondence between the world and the word. Language appears as a palimpsest thrown upon nature, scraping other layers before it. Such a notion of the palimpsest is reminiscent of the will to retrieve a natural perspective beneath the European culture that is to be found in the texts of the American Renaissance.

Such linguistic palimpsests are embodied by time, but also often figured in space, with exile being a recurrent theme in the poetry. One collection, *The Fortunate Traveller*, borrows its title from the first English picaresque

novel, *The Unfortunate Traveller; or, The Life of Jacke Wilton* by Thomas Nashe. Robinson Crusoe,[6] Ovid, Dante, Ulysses,[7] the poet's persona experiences a series of displacements from his true place. Plurality supersedes duality here, as palimpsests are endlessly reiterated, fragmenting and diffracting language. There runs throughout the collections a Joycean theme in which the dislocation of one language to the profit of others is strongly linked to a diegetic odyssey.[8] Travelling goes hand in hand with losing the entirety of language, with falling into palimpsestual idioms. Foreign languages twirl and swing, from Latin to French, to Yoruba, to Italian or Spanish: "the Word/is gibberish"—the word gibberish originated in the West Indies pejoratively to designate Creoles ("A Village Life", *The Castaway and Other Poems, Collected Poems*, 1986: 80). Among the various palimpsestual relations Genette lists out (pastiche, parody, etc.) there, ranks the transposition and more notably the translation. In some respects, Derek Walcott is attempting to "translate" an entire, almost extinct culture into its English counterpart, or at least into some sort of English. As in a bad translation, one would be entitled to read the Indian or African tongues through the fabric of the text, and every new language would be just another palimpsest.

As one goes from language to language, one also goes from text to text—another Joycean trait of course.[9] Quotations from other works abound,

6 Two collections bear a title that is an explicit allusion to Crusoe: *The Castaway* and *The Gulf* (a borrowing from Defoe's text in which a stranded Crusoe writes about the gulf that now exists between society and himself).

7 "The drizzle tightens like the strings of a harp/A man with clouded eyes pick up the rain/and plucks the first line of the *Odyssey*" ("Maps of the World", *Collected Poems*, 1986: 413).

8 Thus in the fourteenth episode, "The Oxen of the Sun", Dublin, "the second city", appears as overshadowed by London, centre of the Empire. References from the whole British tradition, from medieval verse to nineteenth century prose (most of them eulogies of London), are mingled "until it ends in a frightful jumble of Pidgin English, nigger English, Cockney, Irish, Bowery slang and broken doggerel", according to a letter written to Frank Budgen, 20 March, 1920. This episode also links Black Pidgin to the undoing of proper English: "See him today at a runefal? Chum o yourn passed in his checks? Ludamassy! Pore piccaninnies! Thou'll no be telling me thot, Pold veg! Did ums blubble bigsplash crytears cos frien Padney was took off in a black bag? Of all de darkies Massa Pat was verra best. I never see the like since I was born" (Joyce 1992: 560). Piccaninny originally applied in the West Indies and America to coloured children, and "darkies" points in the same direction. As for "Massa Pat", it combines Blackness and Irishness.

9 Let us note here that the Irish were important in Derek Walcott's intellectual formation. At the Catholic school which he attended, many of the teachers were Irish and among others they made him read Yeats and Synge, two authors who initiated the Celtic Revival and tried to transcribe the language that was still spoken on the Aran Islands. Walcott later staged Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, a play which is all about superimposing voices, as Krapp listens to tapes he recorded in the past, and comments on them.

usually imbued with irony, often appearing as puns and scholarly pranks. The poet likes to cast himself in the role of the (post)colonial trickster, who has been confined to comedy and takes full advantage of it. The whole poem of "The Schooner Flight" may be read in this light, with its dialect rewriting of classics and plebeian narrative. The first line is borrowed from the mediaeval classic *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman*, while "I'm the drowned sailor in her *Book of Dreams*" ("The Star Apple Kingdom", *Collected Poems*, 1986: 359) is an allusion to Phlebas, the drowned sailor in *The Waste Land*, which is already an intertextual reference to *The Tempest*. In the same poem, "I shall scatter your lives like a handful of sand" is a parody of John Donne's famous meditation, "I shall scatter your lives like a handful of dust", mingled with, once more, Eliotian accents ("I will show you fear in a handful of dust") (Eliot 1936: 32). This is what Gérard Genette (1982) primarily calls a palimpsest: a text in which intertextuality appears as minor versions and faint echoes in the text. Such a dimension becomes a literary game with the reader, in Derek Walcott's poetry, and may also recall Walter Benjamin's theories on translation. The latter explains in *Illuminations* how translation brings one closer to art as one progresses from reality and into layers of language and languages:

> Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame. Contrary, therefore, to the claims of bad translators, such translations do not so much serve the work as owe their existence to it. The life of the originals attains in them to its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering. (Benjamin 1972: 72)

Similarly, Derek Walcott's poetry often stages itself as a possible translation of other texts in other languages, and as their "most abundant flowering".

All this, of course, is an illusion of linguistic refoundation and Indian languages in *Collected Poems* stand as nothing more than a zany reverie. Instead, what develops is some vernacular that mimics the language spoken on the street by the people, one which necessarily carries the spectres of all forgotten tongues. The model, for *Another Life* just as for the other collections, remains prominently that of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, the first text written in colloquial Italian as a rebellion against scholarly, respectable Latin. This is a very Whitmanian attitude, a very American one, in the broadest sense of the term—that of the true, simple American ready to spurn European, high-brow culture as fully inadequate. Derek Walcott strains to invent a language that would deviate from Standard English and integrate the Creole spoken on the street by the common man, by everyman. Agrammaticality then proliferates:

> Well, when I write
> this poem, each phrase go be soaked in salt;

> I go draw and knot every line as tight
> as ropes in this rigging; in simple speech
> my common language go be the wind,
> my pages the sails of the schooner *Flight.* ("The Schooner Flight", *Collected Poems*, 1986: 347)

Again, one runs against (auto-)referentiality ("My Pages the Sails of the Schooner Flight"). Genesis is always derived; it happens through the combination of textual rags; it ends the verse rather than opening it ("In our own entrails, genesis"; "The Casteaway", *The Casteaway and Other Poems, Collected Poems*, 1986: 57). Thus "The Spoiler's Return", which draws upon a famous calypso by Mighty Sparrow entitled "The Bedbug", is grafted on the poem "A Satyr against Mankind" by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester,

> Were I, who to my cost already am
> One of those strange, prodigious creatures, Man,
> A spirit free, to choose for my own share,
> What case of flesh and blood I pleased to wear,
> I hope when I die, after burial,
> To come back as an insect or an animal. ("The Spoiler's Return"; "The Fortunate Traveller", *Collected Poems*, 1986: 433)

The verses mean nothing other than the seventeenth century poet does: "I'd be a Dog, a Monkey, or a Bear, /Or any thing but that vain Animal/Who is proud of being rational". In a frank spurning of the English classic they say the same thing, but with a different metre, swapping iambic pentameters for stressed tetrameters, the metre of calypso.

Such whitmanian *élan* leads the poet to a dream in which he would be the first poet to name the Brave New World, to cleanse his lens of layers of British perspective. He wishes to christen the world, no less: "Christening the pomegranate with a careful tongue" ("Origins"; 1986: 14); "trunks that wait for names" ("Guyana"; "The Gulf and other Poems, *Collected Poems*, 1986: 118). The poet relinquishes the ideal of remembering any one Indian language. In its stead, one writes a "common language" that is not Carib, but Caribbean:

> For no one had yet written of this landscape
> that it was possible, that there were sounds
> given to its varieties of wood. (*Another Life*, 8, *Collected Poems*, 1986: 195)

One would think, then, that in a final reversal Derek Walcott outdid palimpsestual layers and retrieved the untainted origins of language. But then this isotropy, which runs through the collections, is fraught once more with references to other subtexts. It is a distinct Caribbean theme, to be found in Aimé Césaire ("Je retrouverais le secret des grandes communications et des grandes combustions. Je dirais orage. Je dirais fleuve. Je dirais feuille. Je dirais

arbre")[10], or in Alejo Carpentier ("the only task appropriate to the milieu that was slowly revealing to me the nature of its values: Adam's task of giving things their names", *The Lost Steps/Los Pasos Perdidos*, quoted before the second part of Derek Walcott's *Another Life*). The palimpsest introduces a tension between layers of intertextuality and a wish to retrieve some linguistic origin. In any case, it returns, and returns as an unappeased ghost or like all those exiles, Odysseus and others, who cannot reach their destination.

Poetry, in Derek Walcott's work, is understood as an oscillation between worlds and tongues, one in which English is never quite doomed to lose:

> [...] when I was green like them, I used to think
> those cypresses, leaning against the sea,
> that take the sea-noise up into their branches,
> are not real cypresses but casuarinas. ("The Schooner Fight", *The Star Apple Kingdom, Collected Works*, 1986: 353)

Once again, the poem is set under the sign of reversal, reverting against all odds to the English name of a Caribbean nature; it is no hazard that such a statement should be uttered in iambic pentameters. Such negotiations with the language of the oppressor were held against him, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, when other authors were veering towards the reproduction, fictitious or otherwise, of African languages. Walcott sees in English a way into retaliation, through a discrete subversion: "It is the language which is the empire, and great poets are not its vassals but its princes" (Walcott 1998: 51). In "*The Schooner Flight*", Shabine exclaims: "But that's all them bastards have left us: words" (the first version, published in the *Massachusetts Review*, incidentally read: "That's all those bastards left anyway. Words", which once more testifies, with such a slip from "those" to "them", to the search for agrammaticality, to a tongue which would be more popular, more common, but which would also mimic a—delusive—return to the origins).

Collected Poems is infused with the feeling that things can always be turned upside down, that life may start anew with every realization and awareness, with each sensation. Representation becomes vain and unstable and renders the world impossible to perceive or conceive, betraying in this the influence of Yeats, who remained concerned with such questions throughout his life. The book is fraught with carnivalesque practices setting into motion every couple of apparently conflicting opposites, imposing inversion as the only possible discourse. Texts often conclude in an impossibility to choose among an alternative as was already the case in "A Far Cry from Africa", an early poem which is set under the sign of the wheel. At the beginning of the second

10 Césaire (1939: 21). This is a text that Derek Walcott has not only read, but translated.

paragraph, the cries of ibises are described as having "wheeled since civilization's dawn" and the poet ends up confessing that no possible choice stands and that he is at a loss as to "where [he] shall turn", with the last word sending us back to the idea of revolution rather than duality. The poem does not so much describe the terms of an alternative as the idea that binary couples are irrelevant to the poet's predicament, and will keep cancelling each other.

"(I)n the final analysis, the mutability of language expresses the infinity of a vital force that stands above the concept of death and even above the concept of birth", the Italian philologist Terracini writes in *Come muore una lingua* ("How a Language Dies", 1957: 18).[11] Such vitality is used by Walcott to cast again the last remnants of the Carib language into poetry. Wishing to make the Indian sounds heard again, the poet resorts to perambulation, keeping their empty shell and writing on top of them, in a palimpsestual attempt. As in Joyce, translation, both physical and linguistic or even literary, is often a trick, a forgery. Retrieving lost languages is denounced as a pipe-dream, while the poet appears as the cartographer of a waste land where nothing will be unearthed, but where the wholeness of a lost language might be projected on the screen of literary dreams through the re-foundation of a common language spoken by the lowly and the poets alike. Palimpsests are not so much superimpositions, it appears, as revolutions and reversals: "so I leave it for them and their carnival" ("The Schooner Fight", *Collected Poems*, 1986: 346).

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17

Indigenous Hatred and Fear
Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*

Florence Labaune-Demeule
Université Jean Moulin-Lyon 3, Lyon, France

Edwidge Danticat's novel *The Dew Breaker*[1] tells the story of what Haitians call *shoukèt laroze*, a dew breaker, ironically named Bienaimé (French for "well-loved") in the novel. However, the reader soon realizes that the author typifies all dew breakers, those terrible henchmen who, during the Haitian dictatorship of the Duvaliers between 1957 and 1986, arrested, imprisoned, tortured and killed fellow Haitians believed to be political opponents or disloyal citizens. As they acted mostly at dawn, such henchmen were known as dew breakers.

The central character in the novel is an overpowering figure embodying universal violence—a beast or monster in the guise of a man. He is, therefore, perceived as the hateful Other, the figure of Evil. More unbearable, perhaps, is the fact that he is also "one of them", a fellow Haitian; he is the traitor within the community, or in Christian terms, another Judas. While representing the Other, he also embodies the Same, the Self. His stance is all the more problematic as the hateful Other is to be found within the Self, in a Janus-like representation of opposites. The past and the present in his life—one should almost say "lives"—are moulded in terror and fear: the fear to see the past invade the present and to see the monstrous, almost forgotten Other, surface into the artificially peaceful present of the exiled, barbarous man who has now ironically become a barber, living the peaceful life of a loving father and husband. Such a dichotomy lies at the heart of the dew breaker's life.

Although focussed on this protagonist, the stories of different characters who are in varying degrees affected by the dew breaker's terrible past show that each of them is haunted by this man's actions: the Other he embodies has significantly altered the course of their lives and has transformed their own selves into something Other. All of them try to regain their past unity, to

[1] All subsequent quotations from the text refer to the following edition: Edwidge Danticat. 2004. *The Dew Breaker.* London: Abacus.

conquer again, using their own means, the Land of the Self that they have lost, their own I-Land, although this, to some characters such as Beatrice, seems illusory.

The reader's journey therefore proceeds along two different paths: one horizontal, mimetic of the characters' movements through life, and one vertical, representing the characters' meditations about their own history. The reader thus navigates through narrative islands, which are different accounts of the characters' lives, and through narrative I-Lands, in which the Selves, broken by the Other, try to reconstruct themselves. But Danticat rejects any Manichean and simplistic vision of violence, terror and hatred, unveiling all the psychological repercussions of such acts. Hence the very particular narrative structure and the original narrative devices used in the novel—writing about the Other outside the Self and within the Self—yielded a new literary form based on in-betweenness and understatement.

This chapter first studies the character of the Dew Breaker as the representation of Otherness. However, he also represents Otherness within the Self. The fact that the Dew Breaker belongs to the same community and yet embodies duality, is studied in the second part of the chapter. Finally, attention is directed to the narrative means Danticat employs to express such duality and complexity. These elements are only summarized here.

The Dew Breaker As the Agent of Otherness: The Transformation of the Characters' Selves into Others

As a member of the Duvaliers' militia, the dew breaker appears as odd man out—the representative of violence and hatred, of horror and monstrosity. He is characterized by his Otherness, which is openly perceptible in the scar which disfigures him and which he always rubs with his fingers or conceals behind the palm of his hand:

> My father now points to the long, pitted scar on his right cheek. I am so used to his hands covering it up that this new purposeful motion toward it seems dramatic and extreme; almost like raising a veil. (2004: 17)

> With each step forward, he rubs the scar on the side of his face, and out of a strange reflex I scratch my face in the same spot. Maybe the last person my father harmed had dreamed moments like this into my father's future, strangers seeing that scar furrowed into his face and taking turns staring at it and avoiding it, forcing him to conceal it with his hands [...]. (2004: 25–26)

As Michiko Kakutani says, "the scar on his face is both a mark of Cain and a reminder of his violent past". Hence, he stands out as the Monster, the embodiment of the Other, generating fear and disgust.

As such, he is a figure who haunts all the past victims of such cruelty and savagery. He is the agent of deep changes—both physical and psychological—in them all. For the Tonton Macoute is not, for them, a nightmarish presence of the past to be forgotten: he still affects their present-day lives. They know that most torturers, alive and left unpunished for their past deeds, can still be met, either in Haiti or in places of exile, such as New York. The deep insecurity generated by their violent acts remains unbearable. All their former victims suffer from important psychic and mental trauma due to the dew breaker's cruelty. "They all find themselves haunted by the long events that left them with broken bodies, fractured families or smashed hopes. For these characters the dead are not merely ghosts; they are palpable, intimately felt presences in their daily lives" (Kakutani 2007).

No one in the novel better expresses the haunting fear of the dew breaker's otherness than Beatrice St. Fort, the bridal seamstress who is interviewed by a young journalist, Aline Cajuste. This story, placed right in the middle of the novel, can be viewed as its structural and thematic climax. It emphasizes the fracture caused by past violence in the character's psyche: Beatrice was tortured by the dew breaker in Haiti and has, since that time, been suffering from bodily pains and, above all, from a deep feeling of persecution. She believes he has settled down in a neighbouring house whenever she has changed homes.

Aline's perspective is essential to the story: she soon realizes that Beatrice is completely ensnared by her fear and has become paranoid. Her fear leads her to transform the reality around her. She might never manage to overcome her past trauma since her paranoia turns to obsession and leads her to the verge of madness. She cannot believe that the dew breaker's violence and perversity have come to an end. It is such suffering that Aline will now try to express in her journalism, giving a voice to those people silenced by solitude and pain, just as Edwidge Danticat will lend them her voice and will keep them company, even after they have been abandoned by all and sundry.

This story makes clear how difficult it is for former victims to feel secure because the dew breaker's otherness can so easily be concealed: he cannot easily be recognized, hunted down or condemned for his crimes precisely because he is a member of the same community and because he is the embodiment of Sameness. He is nothing more than a fellow Haitian. This explains why it is so difficult to heal the past wounds and find solace. All the characters are haunted with the same desire to hunt down the dew breaker or to reach the truth about their sometimes obscure past, whether one thinks of Dany in "Night Talkers", of Michel in "Monkey Tails", or of the three girls in "The Funeral Singer". Dany's confrontation with the dew breaker who killed his parents does not alleviate his suffering, nor does Michel's confrontation with his own past. In all cases, past exactions are shown to have dual consequences: on the one hand, the brutality changed such people's personalities, transforming their former

selves into others, altering the course of their lives in an irremediable way. On the other hand, while the former victims remain haunted by the past, the dew breaker's life has turned to something much quieter, the life of a peaceful paterfamilias, which acts as a mask to his past deeds. Strangely enough, the beastly Other in his personality has receded to give way to a new manifestation of Otherness similar to the attitude and behaviour of the character before his first transformation. Nothing apparent can make him any different from other exiled Haitians, except the scar on his face and a few strange elements that his daughter herself has not been able to interpret:

> Is he going to explain why he and my mother have no close friends, why they've never had anyone over to the house, why they never speak of any relatives in Haiti or anywhere else, or have never returned there [...]? Is he about to tell me why my Manman is so pious? Why she goes to daily Mass? I am not sure I want to know anything more than the little they've chosen to share with me all these years [...]. (2004: 16)

Being born and raised in the same country does not suggest unity or solidarity; it can also entail division and cruelty. The Same can also conceal the inhuman, devilish Other in its ranks. The Other lies at the heart of the Self, and the character of the dew breaker, who is introduced in several complementary stories, is the best embodiment of such a duality within the Self.

THE DEW BREAKER AS THE EMBODIMENT OF DUALITY: THE OTHER WITHIN THE SELF

The dew breaker is the embodiment of duality, and this is structurally restored by the framing nature of the two stories which respectively open and conclude the novel, "The Book of the Dead" and "The Dew Breaker". All the other stories indirectly illuminate his personality, which is revealed to the reader kaleidoscopically: each piece of the jigsaw puzzle has to be associated with the others in order to construct a full portrait.

How is his duality created? First of all, by means of concealment: he tries to conceal his monstrous otherness by appearing to be indistinct from fellow exiled Haitians. Dissimulation through resemblance is what he has aimed at, adding a few physical alterations. This explains why the former dew breaker is reluctant to meet people, and therefore, to attend Christmas Mass, in "The Book of Miracles". By standing amid people, he risks being recognized, as happens when his own daughter thinks she recognizes Emmanuel Constant.

Even his wife, Anne, is aware of their ambiguous situation. There's no way she can avoid other people's potential doubts and suspicion about her husband's acts. The dew breaker can then be seen as a divided personality at heart, a Janus-like figure with two faces looking in opposite directions. This

also reminds us of the technique of "double heads" in Renaissance painting, in which the same portrait shows opposite visions of the same character, as can be illustrated by Erhard Schön's dual representation of the Pope/Devil character or of the Cardinal/Fool portrait.[2]

But the dew breaker's duality is also concealed behind other masks, which include lies. He has lied about everything, and to everybody, even to his own daughter. It is only because external circumstances force him to confess the truth to his daughter that he does so. Ambiguity springs from the very duality of his situation, from the space in between the truth and the lie. Everything can be endowed with a double meaning: the nightmares can be those of the victim or those of the torturer: "'There's nothing like sinking your hand in sand from the beach in your own country,' Mrs Fonteneau is saying. 'It's a wonderful feeling, wonderful.'/I imagine my father's nightmares. Maybe he dreams of dipping his hands in the sand on a beach in his own country and finding that what he comes up with is a fistful of blood" (2004: 23–24). The scar is not the mark of physical torture as much as the last gesture of a desperate victim, as the last story makes clear.

As the dew breaker's situation is ambiguous, his discourse relies on indirectness: he expresses himself by means of verbal or rhetorical meanders before he can confess his crimes to Ka. He resorts to metaphors (the ceremony of negative confession, the Last Judgement and the weighing of hearts in Ancient Egypt, or the prey/hunter metaphor) to speak out the truth. Anyway, his confession is a hard one, and when words prove inadequate, he falls back on his old, violent ways, involuntarily hurting his daughter. Facing the Other within the Self is not as easy as might be imagined, because it requires awareness, clear-sightedness, the end of wilful blindness.

However, although he is the main character in the novel, the dew breaker is not the only one who has to face the Other within the Self. All the characters who feel guilty in the stories experience a similar predicament. Thus, Anne's love for the dew breaker despite his obscure past can be explained by her own guilt at having let her younger brother drown at sea. She is convinced that she is a sinner and her epileptic fits explain her incapacity to face the terrible Other in herself. Going to Mass is then a means to expiate her sins and to try to find salvation. Even a character like Nadine, the nurse working in the service of laryngectomees, is the embodiment of the Self as both Sameness and Otherness. In "Waterchild", the reader is witness to Nadine's metamorphosis into an Other which, in the end, she cannot recognize as herself. The growing void around her echoes the growing void within herself, generated by the psychological rift due to abortion or miscarriage. The water child, reduced to a mere pebble in a glass of water, is the objectivization of her own new isolation. The self can be

[2] Internet website: http://calviniana.com. Accessed on 5 October 2007. See also the Catalogue of British Museum Satires.

altered into something other at any moment by different circumstances in life. The Other can settle gradually, almost imperceptibly in anybody's life.

And this is precisely what the dew breaker explains in the title story. He was made to adopt the terrible status of a dew breaker by a succession of hardly controllable circumstances and events. And even if this does not alleviate his responsibilities, these new explanations help understand how such horrors can be perpetrated. A series of hardships and chance meetings as well as a new thirst for power and wealth explain the dew breaker's cruelty, his metamorphosis into a monster:

> He had joined the Miliciens, the Volunteers for National Security, at nineteen, after his mother left. It began when the Volunteers came to his town bussing people to a presidential rally in the capital. [...]. With that first smoke and the public drinking of what he now considered inferior liquor, he felt himself transformed into an adult. [...]. He was mesmerised by the procession of humanity, standing before the whitest and biggest building in the whole country. [...] After the third, fourth or fifth hour of the speech, he found himself dreaming. [...]. I thought they were angels, caryatids, maybe a soul for each of us standing there in the sun. (2004: 163–65)

For the ignorant dew breaker, the preacher had to be arrested first because he was a dissident and because, as such, he had identified him, the violent representative of dictatorship, as a new representation of "Satan, the devil" (2004: 158). Conversely, the dew breaker liked thinking about his own victims as the terrible Others to be killed in order to liberate his kin.

From such a situation, it becomes obvious that relativity and universality are at stake in the novel. Every character is, even partially, the embodiment of the Other inside the Self. All are faced with the same duality hinged on the dichotomy between the past and the present, between Haiti and New York. All the personalities are split, divided into different I's by an often invisible scar. And if Danticat's purpose can clearly be identified as a condemnation of torture and violence, she nevertheless wants to point at the complexity of the situation: there can be no Manichean vision of things, as everything is more complex than the usual dichotomy between Good and Evil, between the Self and the Other. Everything is more nuanced, as she says: "I think all of us live nuanced and complicated lives. I am not interested in writing about people who can be defined too easily, who are either too good or too bad. I like to write about those gray places, those spaces, if you will, the stuff in-between."[3]

But writing about the "stuff in-between", about the Other among the Selves and about the Other within the Self requires a particular narrative strategy and

3 Edwidge Danticat in Nathaniel Turner, "A Conversation with Edwidge Danticat", *Chicken Bones: A Journal*, http://www.nathanielturner.com/edwidgedanticat.html. Accessed on 5 October 2010.

the use of precise narrative devices. Danticat's novel offers a new journey among different I-lands and thus offers new narrative perspectives to the reader.

Writing of the Other: Writing as Other

The construction of the novel first requires much attention, precisely because it does *not* look like a novel. It looks like a collection of nine different short-stories, most of which were published beforehand in various magazines or reviews, as is stated on the credits page. Narrative looseness, though disturbing at first, requires a more active participation on the part of the reader, because the latter has to mentally reconstruct the cohesive and coherent links uniting the stories. Each of them is focussed mostly on one character (or small group of characters), whose purposes the reader cannot always interpret spontaneously. Thus, the structural independence of the stories seems to echo the schizophrenic divides in the characters' lives. Each story is told by a different narrator (either homodiegetic or heterodiegetic) and is anchored in a different referential centre, both in time and space. For instance, the dew breaker's daughter and wife in "The Book of the Dead" are mentioned again in "The Book of Miracles". The first name *Anne* is remembered by the reader in "The Dew Breaker": this is an indirect means of insisting on the character's in-between position, which is stressed both on the narrative and the thematic planes. Anne helps thread the stories together by creating veiled cohesion even though, ironically, she embodies the very duality of a character caught between loyalty to her older brother (the preacher), and love for her future husband, the dew breaker. For on close scrutiny the reader has no doubt that she is the same person: the first name is identical, and in both stories she suffers from epileptic fits and loves miracles. "Anne loved miracles, read about them whenever she could, listened to religious radio stations for testimonies of manifestations of the miraculous in everyday life" (2004: 188). Even her feelings after her fits are described in both stories in religious terms.[4]

So the process of active reading permits to establish such indirect connections to try and restore the more general narrative thread which unites all the stories, all the fates of the characters described. It is not fortuitous, then, if the two framing stories devoted to the dew breaker ("The Book of the Dead" and "The Dew Breaker") fuse the two different narrative threads within the final story: after the meeting between the wounded dew breaker and Anne, the narrative comes back to a later temporality, the time of the father's confession in the

[4] "The Book of Miracles" describes them as a "kind of resurrection" ("[...] but when the anger dissipated she considered it a small miracle, the same way she thought of her emergence from her occasional epileptic seizures as a kind of resurrection", (72). Similarly, "The Dew Breaker" uses religious vocabulary: "Her reawakening was a miracle. Once again she had returned from the dead" (2004: 189).

Florida hotel room. The words used then are exactly the same as those used in the first story. Intent readers can then view the same moment in their lives according to their own, individual perceptions of things, Ka's interpretation being sometimes more abrupt or subjective, perhaps erroneous[5] when compared with the mother's.

Thus, the reader can mentally juxtapose them to create his own vision of the scene. He can also make out the main thematic link between all the stories: the presence of the dew breaker himself. The reader's attention is always drawn to this central character, be it introduced as the real, tangible character (Ka's father) or one who is more allusive and indirect. Perceived from the outside by several of his former victims whose sufferings are sometimes only suggested, his portrait is perhaps more potent than a more detailed or more objective description would be. Each story reveals one or several aspects of his multi-faceted personality, the final representation being more complete and more striking. He thus becomes a universal representation of such henchmen. The characters' obsessions then become the reader's.

Instead of telling the dew breaker's story in a more authoritative voice, following more usual patterns and including narrative linearity, Edwidge Danticat has chosen understatement and allusion, plunging the reader into the subtleties of horror. No dominant and unified voice can take charge of such a story. How could a unique, levelling voice speak out so many different stories of violence, of pain, of suffering? How could a unique, omniscient narrator express the stories of those people who were so hurt that they cannot or dare not speak them out loud themselves?

It is, therefore, by resorting to unusual, or "other" narrative means that Edwidge Danticat finally manages to express the untellable stories of these characters. Even though this new literary form, halfway between the genres of the short-story and of the novel, is more often used nowadays, it is here the form which best suits Danticat's purpose. The author can express the characters' predicaments by using a unifying thematic thread, which is not reduced to a unique narrative voice. The reader is faced with fragments of perspective, fragments of broken or sometimes silenced voices, which require other means of expression. For in fact, the reader is faced with a multi-faceted, diffracted vision of the dew breaker, of his family and of his victims: all are united by means of narrative indirectness and understatement. Danticat is here almost silently stitching such short narratives into a moving story of human suffering, in which the Same is confronted to the Other, perhaps in order to draw attention to what Édouard Glissant calls the Diverse (*le Divers*). Narration aggregates all forms of Otherness and makes them consistent by

5 "My mother is clicking her tongue and tapping her fingers against the mouthpiece again. Her soft tone makes me think I have awakened her from her sleep" (2004: 19).

means of reconstructed cohesion through reading, in order to build another significance:

> Le Divers, qui n'est pas le chaotique ni le stérile, signifie l'effort de l'esprit humain vers une relation transversale, sans transcendance universaliste. Le Divers a besoin de la présence des peuples non plus comme objet à sublimer, mais comme projet à mettre en relation.[6]

And indeed, it is the almost silent relationships set up by narration and reading among the short narrative I-lands developed in the stories that give the novel its potency. The narrative relation thus generates echoes of what Mathieu Béluse says in his *Traité du Tout-Monde*: "Les pays que j'habite s'étoilent en archipels. Ils raccordent les temps de leurs éclatement."[7] In *The Dew Breaker*, does Edwidge Danticat not introduce the protagonist's story as a fragmented narrative archipelago whose split parts can be brought together by the reader in order to create a reunified, though still fissured vision of darker times?

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6 Glissant (1997: 327). It means: "The Diverse, which is not what is chaotic or sterile, expresses the effort made by the human mind to lead to a transverse relation, without any universalist transcendence. The Diverse needs the presence of peoples, no longer to be viewed as objects to be sublimated, but as a project to be put in relation" (my translation).

7 Glissant (1997: 43). It means: "The countries I live in become starry archipelagoes. They interconnect the times of their fractures" (my translation). One should remain aware that Glissant's purpose is different from Danticat's, but this more general idea fits Danticat's demonstration here.

18

Vaacha
Voice and Memory in the Museum

Brian Coates and Eileen Coates
Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, Baroda, India

The museum, as a site of contested knowledges, produces custodians, spectators, learners and scholars, each with a self-constructed image of attitudes, interests, needs and visions. This chapter considers how the museum can "voice" its multitude of meanings and functions. After a theoretical discussion of the issues involved, the chapter presents a study of Vaacha, the Museum at the Adivasi Academy, Tejgadh, Gujarat.

Suzanne Oberhardt in *Frames within Frames* speaks of the museum as making possible, "human conversation across time and place" (Oberhardt 2001: 17). This is in the context of her discussion of the different frames that the term "museum" establishes. The first is the sacred or hierarchical frame whereby a moral authority is established by a dedicated group of experts set apart from society. This group treasures and protects the history of human culture as told in its artefacts. A second frame points up the deficiencies of this model by, in Oberhardt's words, defining the museum as "racist, sexist, homophobic, colonial and elitist and as an institution hell-bent on indoctrinating its citizens into the ideologies of a wealthy ruling class" (ibid.: 6). This binary, all too familiar from contemporary discussions across the sciences and humanities, is somewhat depressing. We seek, therefore, to find a ground where the museum itself can offer a voice that responds to ideological concerns, while also recognizing the stored memories and values that tangible and intangible heritage presents. The intangible heritage—beliefs, songs, stories—is particularly important in the case of adivasi culture.

The concern is to find a voicing between the idea of museum as cathedral, the "sacred" frame and the idea of museum as an inviting social space open to the community. The current attempt in many Western museums to increase audience size has led to an uneasy balance between education and entertainment. The famous (or infamous) Victoria and Albert Museum advertising campaign

of a few years ago—"ace caff—with a nice museum attached" is one instance of this.

A concept we wish to use here to discuss the Tejgadh experiment is that of the middle voice, a voice that lies between active and passive voices in several grammars; the claim here is that its ambivalence offers a means of allowing the museum a form of expression that respects the curatorial functions of preservation and organization, while providing an outlet for dissent, for the marginalized, for those the "sacred" museum "speaks about". The middle voice offers a passage for objects to actively speak in the subject position, and for active spectators to submit to the memories and rituals inherent in that which they are addressing or spectating. When these relationships become interchangeable or their traditional subject/object relationship becomes deconstructed, the middle voice is a useful means of communicating a meaning.

Jacques Derrida addresses the middle voice in his essay "*Différance*":

> We must consider that in the usage of our language the ending—ance remains undecided between the active and the passive. And we will see why that which lets itself be designated différance is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling something like the middle voice . . . . For the middle voice, a certain nontransitivity, may be what philosophy, at its outset, distributed into an active and a passive voice, thereby constituting itself by means of this repression. (Derrida 1986: 9)

The essay, first published in 1972, is one of the pioneering documents of deconstruction, and the doubling of *différance* is designed to reinstall the visible into the language system (the "a" of *différance* is not heard as distinguished from "*différence*"); the new term combines Derrida's interest in the shift between language as a deferral and as a differing. In the quotation above, Derrida goes further by suggesting that philosophy is the result of an act of repression—the subject/object, active/passive division representing a fall from the ambivalence of the middle voice in which the subject is both the actor and the acted upon.

Deconstruction looks at the space where binary systems are shown to be folded into one another, as a resistance to Western creations of the ideology of the will and the privileging of subjectivity in our cultural codes. The middle voice can be seen as the informing philosophy of the movement, seeking as it does to break up the linguistic straitjacket (which many of us had drummed into us) of subject/verb/object. In applying this to the area of museum study, our intention is to break with the curator/visitor system, which also entails the viewer/object, active/passive binary of the hierarchical museum, and with its inverse, the social and ideological critique of rapacity and greed that has led to the formation of many of the major collections of Europe and America. The middle voice in this context seeks to articulate a continuum that embraces the human meanings of displayed objects. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill suggests,

"material things are now constituted as objects through organic, historic links, through stories, and through people" (Hooper-Greenhill 2003: 204).

Roland Barthes, following Benveniste, discusses the linguistic organization of "person" in "*To Write: An Intransitive Verb?*":

> [...] a correlation of personality, which sets person (I or you) in opposition to the non-person (he or it), sign of what is absent, of absence itself ... While ego always has a position of transcendence with regard to you ... yet I and you are reversible. (Barthes 1986: 15–16)

Barthes points out that this substitution is not possible for non-person/person except through the middle voice, which offers linkage or transitivity between subject, verb and "object" (which, strictly speaking, has, in middle voice terms become integrated with subject). At the 1966 Johns Hopkins conference where Barthes delivered this paper, Jean Vernant in the after-talk discussion suggested to Barthes that the ancient middle voice was lost as the Greeks formulated a vocabulary of the will and a philosophy that insisted that agents are the source of actions. He also suggested that Barthes' paper argued for "the reappearance of the middle voice" (Donato and Macksey 1972: 152). It is an interesting side-issue that both Derrida's essay on *Différance* and Barthes' "*To Write: An Intransitive Verb?*" appeared in 1972, at the birth of the deconstructive movement in philosophy and politics. Indeed Derrida was also in the audience for Barthes' paper and contributed his own view of the middle voice in a meditation on the possibility of the phrase, "I am dead". Perhaps the famous "swinging sixties" did in fact shift the tectonic plates of what it means to be a human being and to think. As is now well known, the feminist movement, so important in that decade, was the leading inspiration for much of the new thought and has remained at the cutting edge of much work in deconstruction.

This chapter concerns one specific museum where local curators are attempting to implement an alternative mode of voicing their collections. The curatorial group at the Museum of Voice in Tejgadh, Gujarat, is drawn from the adivasi community, tribal people who have led a semi-visible life since the insurrections (called a "mutiny" by the colonial powers) of 1857. The governments of Gujarat and India officially recognize the need to rectify the historical injustices that these people have suffered and one element of the new Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh is a museum where tribal lives and histories may be presented and celebrated and where marginalized people can once again see the richness of their own traditions.

Vaacha—Museum of Voice was established in 1999 and its activity reaches into central, peripheral and remote corners of adivasi culture, aiming to remember and keep alive the music, narratives, knowledges and beliefs that have been passed along the public and domestic routes of community life. This museum contains—and disperses—a vibrant matrix of tribal culture. The

adivasi communities possess a dearly-bought wisdom; their heritage is located in precious, increasingly fading, memories; fragile artifacts; domestic rituals; special connections with the land, with animals, with the natural world and with folk medicine. Beliefs, stories, music and knowledge are communicated across generations without being written down, and the Museum of Voice values this orality. In *Museums after Modernism*, Griselda Pollock refers to the museum as "a place of making and experimentation, whose impact was precisely on the subjectivity of the participants ... working with made things and making things whose significance was not their objecthood, but their capacity to incite meanings and activate thought" (Pollock and Zemans 2007: 29). To help implement this "capacity", Vaacha is run by a group of local men and women from the Rathwa tribe. In the museum world, it can be seen as acting in line with best practice, run by the indigenous community for and about its own people.

Memory plays an essential role in the transmission of the indigenous life, a theme which has been eloquently discussed by Susan A. Crane: "Museums organise the significance of what we already knew—the archives we carry in our minds, the ineffable as well as the rigorously conscious memories that comprise our knowledge" (Crane 2006: 102). Memory at Tejgadh is built into the fabric of the ancient site on which it is situated. The museum is within sight of the sacred hill of Mount Koraj, the location of prehistoric rock paintings; and the landscape is a constant reminder of the history of the communities and their enduring power. It is a stimulus to the work of memory, which is inscribed in all of the Academy programmes at Tejgadh. The museum community interact with these programmes in several ways. Such activities as tribal studies, organic agriculture, gender empowerment, microcredit and human rights are courses that play off the museum collection. To take one example: the academy aims to raise the consciousness of local communities in areas of gender and agriculture. When the people from local villages meet in the academy to learn how to better grow their crops or to consider the education of girls, they also see the museum in action. A *koti*—a grain store—was made by a local woman and given to the museum. It is a physical reminder of the "old ways" of the village; but it also displays the keen skill, historical knowledge, strength and stamina of the maker, a woman. Furthermore, there is a collection of objects near to the koti: a bottle of old rocks from the local area, musical instruments, cooking stoves, carved wooden figures, a bow and arrows. Each of these can trigger reminiscence—they are artefacts that belong to the communal store. Not far from the Academy, there were Hindu/Muslim riots in 2002. These are remembered too; this is also a programme for peace built on the remembrance of those years.

Different audiences frequent the museum, and the curators consider the varied needs of these visitors. In this museum, the first user is the tribal

community; Rathwa men, women and children living in the locality, or people from other tribes visiting from Gujarat or other states in India. Rathwa people visit most often and their collection includes many photographs, domestic objects and musical instruments that are familiar to them in their lives in the villages. Carol Scott, referencing Falk and Dierking, comments:

> [...] the unique type of learning experience offered by museums ... mediated through objects, is particularly effective in stimulating visual memory. ... In addition, museums are predominantly a social experience and there is abundant evidence that learning mediated through social interaction has longer-term 'holding power'. (Scott 2002: 52)

The mission of Vaacha is to promote and support awareness among tribals of the richness of their own cultures to generate the "social interaction" that Scott mentions. A conference on traditional tribal literature, like the one held in November 2005, is typical of the activities to be found at the museum. Performance and recitation were the most common presentations. The atmosphere was of a celebration, recognizing the richness of the memories held by each individual, contributing to the understanding of the assembly and given status by the context of the museum/academy. Other activities that enliven the academy include use of the space for small gatherings or for thousands; groups of dancers and musicians from all over Gujarat performing in the darkness, lit by flaming torches; the staging of a play such as *Bulldozer* by the Budhan theatre company which, with its narrative of the uprooting of a settlement, moves an audience to tears.

Adivasis make up eight per cent of the population of India. These communities are concentrated in a belt across the country from Gujarat in the west through Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to West Bengal and Orissa in the east, and in the north-east. Through its activities, Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, based in Baroda, supports tribal and denotified communities in their efforts to achieve healthcare, social justice and economic empowerment as well as provides support to the issue of cultural identity. The activities of the museum are a clear evidence of this. While Rathwa is the local language spoken daily in the museum, the academy at Tejgadh provides a forum for the languages of all communities; for example, over ninety languages were represented at the National Conference on Contemporary Adivasi Languages in 2005.

Adivasis have a few written languages and so their intangible heritage is passed on through memory and oral communication. In collaboration with The Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, Bhasha is developing pictorial glossaries to enable more adivasi languages to be recorded and published. According to the 2001 Census of India, 46.1 per cent of females and 70.7 per cent of males in rural India are literate (Census of India, 2001); given the marginal position of tribal communities in society, the figure is likely

to be lower than these averages. The museum staff acknowledges that they are privileged in having several years of education; they can all read and write. Their first language, Rathwa, is an oral language, but they write in Gujarati and some of them have Hindi as well.

Vaacha holds artefacts and records of tribal cultures. It actively documents the adivasi life of the locality, and also collects tangible and intangible material from other communities. Events such as the First National Convention of Adivasis and Nomads, which was held in Delhi in April 2005, in collaboration with the IGNCA, have been filmed and added to the archival resources of the museum. It acts as a forum for adivasi music, story, and art, and displays material about the history and customs of the people, including musical instruments, cooking stoves, textiles, bead work. There is a collection of photographs: some are of *melas*—festivals—in towns and villages; some record the occasions of visits to the campus by guests from overseas and from India; another set of photographs documents the practice of traditional crafts such as woodcarving, bamboo work and pottery making. These photographs prompt much discussion among visitors to the museum. The concept of a museum of objects as a place for things to be kept and conserved was not familiar to the students when they began their studies. Now they are able to explain their collections with informed and enthusiastic commentaries. Every week groups of tribal people from Gujarat come to the Academy for training programmes and to the health clinic at the weekends. These visitors spend time in the museum, looking at the exhibits, recognizing the domestic utensils and apparatus of their own homes. The museum group are from the same places. They talk to understanding to the visitors, encouraging them to value the way of life that they represent and to share their knowledge. In February 2007, Bhasha organized a workshop to initiate a National Consortium of Tribal Arts. This consortium will bring together a network of museums in Tribal Research and Training Institutes from all over India. The professional skills of research and documentation that the museum group are learning for this project will enable the voice of the museum at Tejgadh to be heard throughout the tribal communities, in the outside society of all India, and in the wider world.

The mission of the Adivasi Academy is to create an environment in which the cultural identity of adivasis is reinforced and communicated. As we have tried to show, the museum and the students who direct it are at the heart of this experiment.

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19

Indigenous Voices in Australian Universities
Towards a Collaborative Pedagogy

JULIAN SILVERMAN
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia

The Labour Government under Kevin Rudd apologized for the forced removal of indigenous children from their parents throughout much of the twentieth century. Therefore, now, greater opportunities exist for academic institutions and indigenous communities to work in partnership to support the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Within the still very fraught context of relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, the non-indigenous staff of universities can work for and with these diverse communities despite the lack of engagement that characterizes relations between the "mainstream" and indigenous communities.

This chapter examines some practical examples of such collaborations in learning. It explores, firstly, how at the Royal Melbourne University of Technology non-indigenous trainers worked with indigenous community members to set up a Train the Trainers programme in a collaborative, culturally appropriate and respectful manner. This emerging pedagogy is based on the positioning of indigenous perspectives within the curriculum (Langton 1993; Phillips and Lampert 2005). The aim of this programme was to support community members to conduct training that they saw as important in their own communities to develop capacities of their peers and young people.

Supported by the university, this work has resulted in indigenous people leading several further community-building partnership initiatives in which the academy follows the lead of the communities. Finally the chapter addresses how the indigenous trainers have bought their special skills and talents in training to bear within the non-indigenous context—through providing classes to non-indigenous students on the issues, challenges and successful programmes within indigenous communities today. This new level of partnership has seen the indigenous students become teachers in order to break down the barriers

of ignorance, and challenge the misconceptions that plague relations between non-indigenous and indigenous peoples in Australia.

The aim of this chapter is to outline what the non-indigenous university trainers have learned from indigenous people about the importance of listening to communities, respecting their cultures and ways of working. The centrality of issues of culture to community development and education is a core theme of this practice (Howard 1995). An important aspect of the process is the university trainers' challenging of the "unconscious colonial voice" within themselves and their workplace. This represents not a personal challenge, but one which creates potential conflicts with colleagues within an academy that seeks to assert mainstream ways of knowing and teaching and learning as the "right" way of working with diverse groups and communities.

The non-indigenous teaching team involved in this initiative engages in critical reflection upon its practice and considers their sense of their *positionality* in relation to their own and the participants' cultural identity. That is, they take into account the ways their own cultural perspectives influence their work (Dyer 1988).

Such an approach enables indigenous and non-indigenous specialists in community work, community development and education to collaborate through an application of Transformative Learning Theory, which uses education to generate social change (Schugurensky 2002) through culturally relevant teaching and learning models and strategies that can increase participation by, and meet the needs of, indigenous Australian students.

About the Indigenous "Train the Trainers" Programme

In February 2005, twenty-five indigenous community workers and five mainstream staff from rural areas in the state of Victoria first gathered to undertake an accredited course to recognize and enhance their skills as community service trainers to strengthen their communities. They were members of a variety of community organizations and government departments. A group member pointed out what the course meant to them, as individuals, in terms of their professional development: "I'm hoping that the course will help me with my personal development and therefore reflect that in my dealings with community members and others".

However, all participants affirmed in their comments that they were undertaking the course not only to develop themselves, but also their communities. One said they were doing the programme to "Give community the ability to train our own communities".

The programme was seen to be consistent with community aspirations and was shaped by the group as far as possible within the constraints of a

government-set curriculum. Several factors were crucial to the success of this and future programmes. Foremost among these was the principle of working in partnership with indigenous communities, a process that requires non-indigenous staff to tackle their unconscious commitments to "colonial" approaches to education and indeed the role of the academy.

Within the context of Australia's history, exclusion and marginalization have characterized and continue to mark the engagement of indigenous peoples within the educational system at every level from the pre-school through to the tertiary. This lack of participation correlates all too highly with the discrepancies in life expectancies between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, health and other quality of life indicators.

The local community initiated the "Train the Trainers" programme. They arranged the venue, catering, and most importantly the recruitment of further participants. This ownership of the programme's logistics was a first step towards successful collaboration.

More than sharing responsibility for logistics, the partnership is based on a deep respect for what indigenous people know and how they communicate this knowledge. The negative experiences of many indigenous people within Australia's educational systems have arguably been fuelled by a lack of respect for oral traditions of teaching and learning. Participants in their written feedback had much to say about textual approaches to learning, which many saw as inhibiting rather than as enabling. In describing the worst part of the programme, one person commented about difficulties in "trying to understand the workbook". Another noted that a problem was "probably writing". Many students complained about the jargon-laden language of the "Train the Trainers" programme syllabus set by the national government. One member said in her written comments, "Some of the questions were a bit jargon [sic] unless they were explained to me".

This barrier of jargon was turned to their advantage by the trainers, who actively criticized it. The group was asked to try and decipher sentences and phrases projected onto a screen. Thus enabled to deconstruct arcane, bureaucratic language into plain English, they reported feeling empowered. They were invited to question the sense of educators and government using convoluted language and encouraged to openly ridicule it before interpreting it in their own vernacular forms of English.

This approach to questioning and challenging educational authority embodied in text is consistent with Paolo Freire's critical pedagogy. Rather than seeing students as "empty vessels to be filed with knowledge", they are to be valued for the knowledge and skills that they currently have. It is partly for this reason that the university trainers did not promote themselves as experts and participants as inexpert.

The indigenous community workers not only possess knowledge and capabilities in terms of their social work, they also proved excellent trainers, relying on oral communication skills, including their abilities to work with and engage entire groups in a workshop session of discussion and skills practice. By contrast many non-indigenous colleagues may rely overly on the white-board, written handouts and on scripted session notes, rather than spontaneously imparting information and evoking the group's input.

This building on the strengths of indigenous learners is a key principle of working in partnership with indigenous groups. The university trainers found that the indigenous community's ways of planning and conducting training sessions reflected very good educational skills and practices easily assessable within the mainstream qualification framework.

Cultural respect naturally flows from the recognition of indigenous ways of working and learning. This involves far more than deconstructing officious text through a group process. It is based on even more than respecting a group's oral mode of learning. Cultural respect is about realizing that both cultures—that of the hegemonic and as well as that of the marginalized—have equal validity, meaning and value.

Culturally respectful models of training can play an important role in maintaining and developing culture. The assimilation and destruction of indigenous cultures continues in southern Australia. Many languages and aspects of tradition are under threat. The day-to-day reality of indigenous people was frequently discussed in the programme, and was noted by at least one participant as a challenging aspect of the course. She reflected on "... feeling the shame of people's ignorance towards indigenous people".

Elders and others work hard to ensure that culture and community life is strengthened. One member wants "to train young community workers in order to keep the community alive".

The university trainers did not merely seek to make the training culturally relevant through modifying a "mainstream" pedagogy. They maintained and discussed throughout the programme that mainstream cultural and educational practices were merely one way of knowing and learning. "[The] course has been presented to Koorie community culturally and has based learning in how we learn best".

Group members in discussions articulated that for them operating "culturally" meant ensuring that the students worked as a group through all processes, supporting and learning from one another. Competition between members is discouraged and intra-group collaboration is the norm. Secondly, no one is to be placed in a position of feeling ashamed—it is the group's responsibility to ensure the psychological security of all members. One participant named the potential feelings of shame of many when she described her greatest challenge in the course as "expressing myself in front of the group".

Although many were disturbed by the idea of presenting to their peers the simulated training sessions which are a requisite for qualifying, all did so. Many reported a rise in confidence as the initial tense moments of their presentation yielded to more relaxed and enjoyable feelings. Indeed the whole programme but for the presentations, which the small groups had to give their peers, was experienced as enjoyable: "The first day I was very nervous but I was made to feel welcome".

This ability of the group to create a welcoming and culturally appropriate and respectful space with the university trainers led many participants to remark on the way they stayed the length of the course. The group in discussion attributed the very low dropout rate to their enjoying the course. Attrition of indigenous people in Australian educational programmes is an important issue; however the partnership approach led at least one participant to note: "Making it through the first week and returning for the second. I usually pull out when times get tough".

Elders play an important role in communities as well as in any programme. They are deferred to and their guidance and opinions sought. Humour and informality also perhaps define culturally relevant ways of working within the indigenous community context. Finally, it must be said that indigenous people recognize the need for practical solutions and programmes to help manage disadvantage within their communities. The training that they receive and deliver must be useful.

The participating community members have a sterling record of carrying out community development work. Some felt that the initial "Train the Trainers" course gave them skills to add to their repertoire of community building techniques: "It showed me I might have a different way I can contribute to community, make a difference".

Confidence building was seen as an important element of the programme: "[It] gave me confidence in teaching, and learning new ways of how to give information. I now have the confidence and knowledge to run sessions relevant to the development of my community".

Another participant reinforced the message that the course boosted their awareness of their abilities: "... confidence when developing workshops and working with others when presenting [...] confidence to produce and provide training. Having support of community instead of mainstream".

FURTHER PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION

Since the initial 2005 Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment Trainers' Programme, many of the participants have gone on to complete with the university a diploma in community services work with a specialization

in community education. This nationally accredited programme has been developed for and with the group, and run with the group according to their preferred ways of teaching and learning. It involves Elders and other community people as trainers. It has been, and is currently being delivered through recognition of existing skills and is a training model that utilizes the training skills of participants in delivery of the workshops and assessment of students.

These learning and assessment activities include the use of audio recordings combined with workplace documentation to form detailed reflections on the relation between practice and theory. This process, which commenced in 2005, developed to include further groups in remote Australian communities.

In addition to supporting community members' individual learning goals through the diploma, several have used their "Train the Trainers" qualification to develop training within their own communities with the full support of the university. The range of programmes thus developed covers areas such as home and community care, cultural awareness, youth work, oral history, fitness and health promotion and governance.

Most participants of the initial 2005 "Train the Trainers" programme were women and mothers with considerable experience in community work. One of them has gone on to work as an indigenous educational support worker at her child's school. She is now working with the university to develop a culturally appropriate secondary school to attract and retain indigenous young people who are at risk of dropping out. Her cultural expertise and professional knowledge have resulted in a programme model that will see families and children of indigenous families come together at the school to share in learning activities.

She is also taking pains to ensure that non-indigenous school-goers are involved, to minimize any sense of their exclusion and thus prevent possible incidents of racism in an already racially divided community. Yet, another participant arranged a visit to a youth training centre for indigenous young people convicted of criminal offences. Owing to social disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and other factors, the ratio of indigenous incarcerations is vastly disproportionate to that of non-indigenous community members. The group of "Train the Trainers" participants worked with the university to develop a programme to meet the learning needs of the inmates.

Another student has invited the university to support a training programme that equips and encourages indigenous young women to become involved in political life, as well as take on leadership roles in community and other organisations. An Elder recommended the development of a counselling skills programme to help indigenous people support others traumatized through the personal and social structural issues that impact the communities. She will help to conduct the training in this programme.

The partnerships developed have borne fruit for the university as well as the community. From the university's perspective, it has enabled development of educational programmes that it is funded to conduct. The institution's experience has shown that the programmes developed outside of the parameters of partnership with the communities may well be perceived by communities as "colonial" impositions, frequently disrespectful of community aspirations, protocols and ways of working, and ultimately serving the academy's goals rather than those of the communities.

The non-indigenous university trainers feel that they are working primarily for the communities and under their direction, and feel comfortable in their roles. Their programmes are sustainable and appreciated by the communities who help to run them.

TRAINING NON-INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

In order to empower indigenous students it has been necessary to respect and value them as partners in the learning process and to acknowledge and celebrate their expertise. This is important not only in terms of their cultural traditions and practices, but also in the ways that they work to develop their communities. Part of this approach to working with indigenous students involves recognizing the capacities of experienced community workers to effectively educate their less experienced non-indigenous peers in the issues, protocols and practices that relate to working in the indigenous community context.

The following pages describe from the perspectives of non-indigenous students the value of having Aboriginal people, rather than academics talking about Aboriginal people and providing teaching and learning activities in a range of innovative ways as part of an Undergraduate International Studies degree subject entitled "Indigenous Studies".

The course brought together two distinct groups of learners—experienced indigenous community workers in the vocational training sector for the Diploma in Community Education and undergraduate students from across disciplines (particularly social work) in the Higher Education Indigenous Studies course. The indigenous students conducted teaching activities in the course as part of their vocational training in community education.

These learning activities that indigenous students shared in ranged from traditional lectures to hypothetical problems, quizzes, debates, personal reflection and students engaging in well prepared "acknowledgements of indigenous land rights of the country" prior to each session. A student, who enrolled in the course, said: "the course covered theory and there was a lot of community involvement ... fantastic".

The non-indigenous students involved in this programme were regularly asked to provide feedback about their own changing perceptions in relation to Aboriginal affairs as well as the effectiveness of the learning programme. Collated and analyzed, these data reveal a range of interesting outcomes that relate to collaborative, educational processes involving indigenous and non-indigenous students.

The inclusion of indigenous perspectives, provided by Aboriginal community development practitioners within the Indigenous Studies course, enables non-indigenous learners to appreciate the cultural basis of community development practice in local and global contexts. This will apply to all areas of the discipline and not only to those often explicitly deemed to be "cultural", such as gender relations and family structure.

The second rationale of this project is the professional development and recognition of indigenous community workers as authorities on development practice not only within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, but also within a mainstream Australian and global setting.

By providing opportunities for indigenous practitioners to develop skills in teaching and learning through team teaching with experienced university educators, mentoring and continuous professional development, and through finally conducting their own classes using their emerging models of pedagogical practice, the university will be better able to play a leadership role in supporting the status of indigenous capabilities, both in community development and higher education.

Just as indigenous community members are able to shape learning and assessment activities in the vocational training sector, this model provides an insight into the way undergraduate and postgraduate International Studies may be adjusted to inculcate greater sensitization to cultural perspectives in order to make them more accessible to grassroots community workers in other developing country contexts.

Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Collaboration in Teaching and Learning

The course brought two distinct groups of learners together; experienced indigenous community workers in the vocational training sector Diploma of Community Education, and undergraduate students from across disciplines, particularly social work, in the undergraduate Indigenous Studies course.

The course seeks to develop undergraduate degree students studying non-indigenous student knowledge and skills in indigenous culture, community and development issues. Its aim is to develop students' capacities to work with indigenous organizations and communities as well as with mainstream groups

towards further reconciliation and supporting the achievement of indigenous aspirations through collaborative activity.

The indigenous students taught using a discursive panel presentation method, developed over a number of years in the University training teams' indigenous vocational training programmes, to support and encourage culturally appropriate modes of learning. The panels work by creating a mutually supportive context for sharing knowledge as part of a community of learning that emphasizes a collective experience, and uses the process to validate their experiences and achievements in working for their communities. It can be a surprise to both the indigeneous vocational programme learners and the degree students to realize that these experiences reflect major themes in the historical experience and current issues in Australian life, which includes a lack of shared understanding and trust between indigeneous and other communities resulting from dispossession of tribal communities through colonization and the removal of local indigeneous populations to church and government missions where language and cultural practices were suppressed. A student reported: "Excellent community engagement, speakers and activities. Gives you an experience/information you cannot get from a traditional lecture/ tutorial format".

The new approach to teaching is based on the premise that indigenous communities have an enormous amount to share with the mainstream of Australian society, but to date substantial obstacles inhibit this process of mutual learning. This programme was designed to overcome some of those obstacles, while alert to the fact that this form of cross-cultural communication is fraught with misunderstandings and tensions due to the weight of colonial history. One of the names for this kind of collaboration is "reconciliation": not just at the political level, but also in the sense of creating the possibilities for real understanding and partnership. Indigenous people often comment on the extent to which they have had to learn about and work with mainstream culture and institutions and the failure of mainstream education to prepare non-indigenous students, and the society at large to understand indigenous experience: "I think this approach allows the students to explore and see more of what matters to the indigenous community, rather than reading about it. The most unique thing I found was that we are able to communicate with the indigenous community; that is unique because I don't feel I would have, otherwise".

This deficit impelled the course coordinators to consult with the indigenous students to share the teaching and learning within this new approach to indigenous education. Student feedback has stressed the uniqueness of this experience: "Since I have had very limited experience [...] [of the indigenous communities'] considerations and structures and aims, most of what was spoken about was new to me ... but interesting!"

Students experienced the course as extremely engaged and "real" and many were moved by the indigenous community workers' life narratives and descriptions of the issues that confront them and their communities: "It is far more hands-on and allows us to have experiences that we would not normally have. Hearing from community members has taught me a lot about 'reality' instead of just theory".

The coordination team, however, engaged students in theoretical reflection and analysis of these panel presentations by discussing the positions in the temporal and cultural worlds they inhabit: "Encouraging students to grapple with the complexities in a theoretical way [...] looking up and questioning raw assumptions as we participate in the activities and listen to presenters".

The result is a unique model of intercultural, intellectual and social development of students: "This course is completely different to any course I've done before. It works in the real world with members of the indigenous community. This made the course really engaging and challenging".

Fundamentally, what makes the course a success is its ability to use theory as part of the bridge that connects communities and engages students in reflecting on their place in the nation's political, cultural, social and historical development: "The whole format is unique. It is so much a two-way street with ideas collaborating from students and teachers. I have never experienced discussion with people so involved and living within the themes we are learning about".

These outcomes are consistent with the goals of the initiative, which are to develop collaborative relationships based on mutual understanding and shared action to support reconciliation and indigenous aspirations.

Conclusion: A Summary of Successful Partnerships in Indigenous Education

This undergraduate initiative can be considered a success precisely because it is seen as an active partnership between the university and community people, indigenous and non-indigenous students.

A 2007 Australian National Council for Educational Research study, *Pathways and Barriers: Indigenous Schooling and Vocational Education and Training Participation in the Goulburn Valley Region* (Alford and James), details the systemic and complex factors inhibiting indigenous student success. These, they note, include intergenerational trauma and lack of engagement in formal education, discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage. Through developing partnerships with Aboriginal communities with the support of non-indigenous community partners, the RMIT University has been able to develop programmes that are led by students and are valued as they work

towards supporting indigenous community aspirations, emphasize strengths and address issues seen as important by community members.

This approach to partnership is experienced in turn by non-indigenous students as supporting the development of an inclusive pedagogy that responds to their specific aptitudes and allowed them to develop the skill sets they brought to the course, whether this was in the use of digital media, skills in community engagement, or a more textual approach to working with the course materials. The discursive panel teaching method was perceived as promoting inclusivity not only in facilitating dialogue between indigenous and other students, but also in enabling lectures to become discursive spaces that drew on learners' experiences and knowledge as part of the learning process.

A key feature of the learning programme was the indigenous participants' interest and ability in developing, implementing and evaluating the sessions they conducted with other students. This process enables indigenous learners not only to understand more about academic processes and sharing knowledge, but also to formulate skills in academic research study that will form part of their own study pathways. As a result of such shared teaching and learning activities, further initiatives are planned that will see indigenous students making the transition from vocational to degree programmes.

The indigenous students became teachers in the non-indigenous academic context. This is much appreciated not only by the undergraduate students, but also by the university trainers and coordinators who realize that the indigenous students are taking time out from their very busy personal, family and community lives to develop capacities of the class of non-indigenous students. The relationships developed as a result of the partnership-based programmes built on foundations of cultural respect and collaboration and a commitment to serving indigenous communities. The partnership began with collaborative training of trainers and developing an inclusive pedagogy and led to the shared creation of a diploma programme and community development initiatives supported by the university. The story holds promise of the possibilities for true partnership that exist between academies and indigenous people in Australia and other nations.

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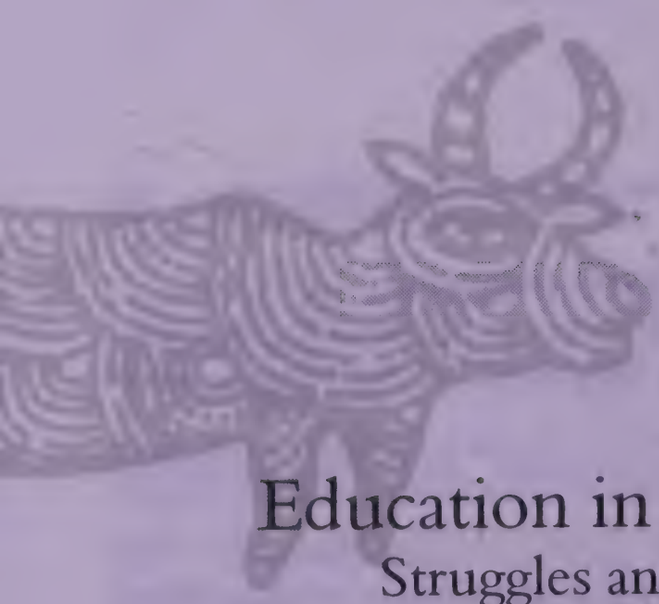

20

Education in a Second Language
Struggles and Achievements of Betta Kurumbar Children

J. Daniel Selvaraj
University of Wales, UK

Introduction

The Betta Kurumbar (BK) is one of the tribal communities found in southern India, in the border districts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. These people have a distinct mother tongue, Betta Kurumba, which is a member of the Dravidian family[1] (Zvelebil: 1981).

The estimated population of the BK is said to be about 32,000 in the three states (1999: 4), with Karnataka accounting for approximately half of the total population (16,000). The other half is evenly divided between Tamil Nadu (8,000) and Kerala (8,000). We estimated the literacy rate among the BK to be approximately 10 to 15 per cent in Tamil Nadu. Even in 2005, it did not seem to be increasing among the younger generation here at the same rate as it did in the other two states. Mohanlal says, "The literacy rate in these areas (Gudalur region—among tribals) is as low as 5 %" (2001).

In general, the tribal people in this region, especially the BK, are traditionally hunter-gatherers. However, when immigrants moved here from the lowlands, the government re-classified the forests, which belonged to the community as Reserved Forests, and the BK began to seek an identity within the "developing economy" and "culture". This search for an identity still continues through the various government-run projects and NGOs (Coelho: 2003).

[1] The researchers, Biju Varghese and I (1999), conducted a socio-linguistic survey among the BK community to assess the need for language development and literacy in their mother tongue. We carried out this survey through the Indian Institute for Cross-Cultural Communication (IICCC).

Through my previous study of the topic and seven years of observation within the community, I can safely say that at present the school attendance rate of BK children at *anganvadi/balavadi* or pre-school is 75 per cent, at primary level 50 per cent and at high school level 25 per cent (most get stuck at the 10th Grade Board Exam). Exceptionally, a few have gone on to higher secondary level. None has gone up to the college level. Looking at these results, I suspect that the government's goal of "Education for All" (*anaivarukkum kalvi*) is not achievable in the case of the BK children. This chapter seeks primarily to enlighten the reader about the children's struggles in education and the government and NGO responses to them in the past, the present scenario and suggestions for a better approach.

Struggles of the school-going children

Though many factors are involved in the struggles of school-going children, I have here chosen to describe in detail and discuss four major aspects related to language, culture, teachers and parents. As discussed below, these aspects are as follows: home language vs. school language, native cultures vs. school cultures, alien teachers at school, and helpless parents at home.

Home Language vs School Language

The BK speak a distinct language, Betta Kurumba, which has few similarities with the languages of the states where they live. However, it differs from them phonemically, lexically and grammatically (Selvaraj 2005). Most of the children start speaking in their mother tongue when they are between 2½ and 3 years of age. They usually join school between 6 and 8 years of age. By this time, these children become fluent in their mother tongue. Moreover, when they join a school, they are exposed to another language—either Tamil or Malayalam or Kannada—depending on the particular state they belong to. Though it is not a big deal for them to learn another language, they have to learn various subjects in a language so far not known to them. So for most, learning their state language begins with learning various subjects. Consequently, these children struggle to understand many of the things the teachers say. Most of the time, the teachers have to learn a few Betta Kurumba words in order to communicate with the child at the initial stage of schooling.

Native Cultures vs School Cultures

Most of these children belong to second-generation families familiar with the school system. Moreover, their previous generations lived as hunter-gatherers and had only an oral tradition, which is still prevalent among the community members. So, the children are accustomed to a lot of freedom without being bound down by time schedules. But when they enter the school system they

lose this freedom, sit in one place and listen to what does not hold their attention. Consequently, school becomes a bitter experience, except for the time spent at play.

Alien Teachers at School

Besides language and cultural issues, at school the children face a teacher who is an alien, speak a different language and behave differently from what they are accustomed to in their home environment. The children, because of their traditional shyness, are also reluctant to engage with outsiders. This further deters the children from developing their skills at school.

Helpless Parents at Home

As the children struggle with a different language, culture and alien teachers, their parents often cannot even understand their struggles. Due to circumstances at home—most BK males tend to squander their earnings on drink, while the females have to earn as well as cook and take care of their children—the children end up getting no aid in matters of schooling from their parents. Moreover, most of the parents are not even educated and are not familiar with the subjects taught at school. Eventually, the parents end up not bothering much about their children's education or future.

Consequences of the Children's Struggles

These struggles significantly affect the children's education, their perspective of acquiring new knowledge, their view of higher education and their confusion regarding fitting back into their own culture.

Drop of Interest in Acquiring New Knowledge

The first consequence of the children's struggles is a diminished interest in acquiring new knowledge (NCERT 2005: 17). Although they often start learning a new language in the school setting, their interest in gaining subject knowledge is suspended right at the start of their schooling. The education system compels them to memorize new information and to reproduce it during the tests. Because primary education is imparted in the state language, the children lose their interest and their creativity is killed at the outset. Thus, their educational journey starts aimlessly thereby losing interest in such irrelevant education.

Lack of Motivation and Dropping Out

The culture and environment in which they are reared, give the students enough freedom to lead a life away from school. Moreover, the medium of instruction, which is often not their mother tongue, along with the teachers

with whom they cannot relate to, aggravate the situation. As a result, the children lose interest in learning right at the start of their educational journey and drop out of school. The reasons given for this are often quite simple—scolded by a teacher; parents not being able to provide for simple school needs; or just to have fun with friends, and so on.

Struggle to Fit Back into the Community

Having dropped out of school early, these students follow the lifestyles of their friends who did not enroll in the first place. If they drop out at middle school or high school level, they have to struggle to fit back into their own society as neither their natural nor their educational skills have been developed. Losing out on their traditional way of life and abandoned by the education system, these children are often alienated. This leads them to reject their own culture, replacing it with destructive behaviour such as addiction to alcohol and drugs.

Children, Parents and Community in Confusion

The community too do not take well to the drop-outs. They are looked down upon as handicapped and unable either to find a job outside the community or unwilling to work on the land. There is even a saying in their culture that drop-outs are not fit for marriage or to look after a family. Thus, the community begins to view education as absolutely inconsistent with their cultural and communal settings, while the children's struggles, first, lead to confusion in their own selves, then to conflicts in their homes and finally to turmoil in the community as a whole.

Government and NGO Efforts in Addressing the Issues

This confusion raises a question about the government and NGO responses towards these issues. I extensively researched this in my earlier study (Selvaraj 2005). The findings from it suggest three kinds of solution: (1) Free education, accommodation, food and supplies, (2) A guide book for tribal school teachers, and (3) Educational workers and tuition centres.

Free Education with Nutritious Food, Hostel and Other Facilities

In response to the above issues, the government opened a number of schools for tribal children in the region, called GTR (Government Tribal Residential) Schools. The Church of South India (CSI) opened a residential high school. However, the teachers in these schools are non-tribals and the medium of instruction and textbooks are in the second language. The children receive free food, accommodation, textbooks, notebooks and clothes. Another NGO, Action for Community Organisation, Rehabilitation and Development (ACCORD), opened an English-medium school (*Vidhyodaya*) for tribal

children up to the 8th Grade. Here the teachers are tribals, and the children speak in their mother tongue. The native culture is respected. The children in this school are seen to perform comparatively better than those in the other schools.

A Guide Book for Teachers in Tribal Languages

Another way the government has attempted to resolve the conflict between the local culture and the school environment is to prepare a guide book for teachers, primarily for them to understand some of the local languages and to help them communicate better with the tribal students. In addition, ACCORD has prepared a students handbook (*Pattola*) with the help of Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) in a tribal language (*Paniya*) to initiate mother-tongue education in the region. However, due to very little cooperation or follow-up from the government authorities, none of the efforts have succeeded beyond one or two years.

Educational Workers and Tuition Centres

Another attempt by ACCORD is to appoint educational workers in some localities and to open tuition centres in the villages. The educational workers gather the school-going children every day and bring them to school. The tuition centres are run by an educated person in the village and the purpose is to teach the children every evening the subjects they learnt at school. Though these seem to be commendable effort, they ignore the children's performance at school and the qualifications and training of the tutors.

The Present Scenario

It is clear that the children's struggles in their education and the government and NGO responses to their struggles are not mutually convergent. The struggles remain pivotal and prolonged. The children's low self-esteem and low academic performance continue, with minimal or no educational achievement so far, and an absence of community involvement in the educational process. This raises several questions about the national goal of "Educational for All".

Low Performance in Schooling and Low Self-esteem of Children

As the children struggle to comprehend the subjects that are taught in the second language, their knowledge of various subjects develops without proper foundations. Since the children themselves do not understand why they are unable to grasp the subjects, they begin to feel that they cannot learn and have no skills (NCERT 2005: 65). As most of the teachers do not understand the reason behind the students' inability to grasp things, they treat the children as though they are ignorant or are poor learners. This puts additional pressure on

them and further lowers their performance in all subjects, except when they learn a second language through conversation.

Very Minimal or No Educational Achievements

With continual diminution in self esteem and low performance, simple reasons suffice to make tribal children quit school. Thus none of the children get as far as higher education. My previous study (Selvaraj 2005) revealed only one boy who went to college. Two or three reached higher secondary level and a very few passed the 10th standard board examinations. The rest dropped out before they got to high school—some before the 8th standard and some before appearing for the 10th standard board examinations.

No Community Involvement in Education

The educational system makes tribal parents and the community stand back and watch because it is totally alien for them. They are unable to help their children in their education, nor are the children able to contribute anything to the community through their education that is being imparted to them. Although one or two schools in the villages have a functioning parents' committee, they cannot contribute anything because of the present system. The community has a rich repository of knowledge in various fields and their own history, but there is no opportunity in the school for children to use what they already know and to build on that knowledge, while the community members feel discouraged from participating in and enriching the education offered. Their feelings of futility are justified. They are excluded from giving their children any assistance because of language barriers and prejudices.

Questioning the National Goal of "Education for All"

Finally, the situation raises questions about the national goal "Education for All". How can all the BK children be brought to school? And how can their learning skills be developed? If the present system continues, the children would continue to struggle in their education, drop out of their schools, while confusion would prevail among students, parents and the community. An alternative approach to tackling the issue is urgently needed.

In Search of a Better Approach

In order to address the children's struggles in their educational careers, a new approach is a must. This should incorporate the children's home language as a strong foundation—their mother tongue is a good bridge to the mainstream culture and language. They must be equipped to connect their school experience with the world around them and have a joyful learning method to develop their creativity.

Starting at Home and Building a Good Educational Foundation

The new approach should include the children's home language and culture. When they start learning in their mother tongue and connect what they are learning to what they are culturally familiar with, their initial confidence will be boosted early in their educational career (NCERT 2005: 37). Then it will be easy to kindle their desire to acquire knowledge of various subjects.

Good Bridge between Native and Outside Languages and Cultures

The children have to move into their state language in order to further their educational career and to enjoy opportunities for participating in national life. The new approach must gradually bring them into the state language and other tongues of school culture. Building their confidence and competence in the state language, both spoken and written, is very necessary (ibid.: 33).

Education, an Added Meaning to the Children and Community

The new approach in education should develop the children's skills by building on the known concepts from their culture and worldview (ibid.: 32). This will make it easy for them to progress and incorporate new knowledge within these contexts and motivate them to acquire more knowledge. The new approach should also encourage the community to feel that they can contribute significantly to their children's education. The community's self esteem will increase as education brings more meaning to their lives. They, in turn, would motivate their children to go forward in their educational career rather than discouraging them.

Creative Teaching Methods and Joyful Learning

The teaching method should be significantly modified to become child-centric, as well as develop creativity from the beginning of the children's educational career. There should be more interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. Teachers should be a model to the children and help them develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. This will make education joyful for the children and will motivate them to go to school despite difficulties faced at home.

Conclusion

The difficulties children face in their endeavour to get educated has serious implications for their parents and their community. It is also being questioned whether the means to achieve the national goal of "Education for All" in the BK situation is a viable one. It will be a great loss to the community and to the nation if their knowledge and resources remain unused and undervalued.

Therefore, this new approach will be a better response to children's struggles as well as to improve the community's self-esteem and pride. It will help achieve the national goal and safeguard the reputation of the authorities regarding their attitudes towards minority tribal communities.

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21

Mahasweta Devi and the Tribal
A Creative Discourse

Bodh Prakash
Department of English, Zakir Hussain College, University of Delhi

Mahasweta Devi's name instantly conjures up vivid images of the tribals of eastern India. Her writings over more than three decades on the lives and tribulations of the Mundas, the Oraons, the Shabars, the Lodhas and other "de-notified tribes" have been acclaimed both in India and elsewhere for their passionate commitment to the cause of the oppressed and exploited people. Both her creative and activist writings have drawn the attention of social scientists, literary theorists, anthropologists and of course numerous translators who have made her writings accessible to the non-Bengali reading public.

While Mahasweta Devi's "firm stand in defense of the exploited" (1990: xviii) can hardly be denied, she refutes the idea that there is "any definite politics" in her writing. She has staunchly opposed all political parties and formations, both right and left wing. In her Introduction to the collection, *Agnigarbha*, she writes: "Life is not mathematics and the human being is not made for the sake of politics. I want a change in the present social system and do not believe in mere party politics".[1] She clearly recognizes that the tribals, together with the so called "lower castes", have always been and continue to be denied their basic rights to a life of dignity. Legislation has meant little to an unlettered people who are so disempowered that they cannot access even what has been provided for them by the state. I suspect that one of the major reasons for her objective stance is her creative imagination and the creative process that goes into the writing of her novels, short stories and plays. "An anger, luminous and burning like the sun, directed against a system that cannot free my people from these inhuman constraints is the only source of inspiration for all my writings"(1990: xx). This "luminous and burning anger" is the creative inspiration that imbues her writing with passion and commitment. But this commitment does not essentialize or simplify what is an extremely

[1] Quoted in Spivak (1987: 179–87).

complex reality that the tribal community lives with. And therein lies the strength of Mahasweta Devi's creative works. Sensitive and keenly alive to the gross depredations and violations and continuous exploitation of the tribal community, the creative writer maintains her objectivity. She enters the tribal's world, becomes a part of it and yet paradoxically enough also stands outside it, an observer whose vision can capture the entire experience in its totality and give it a creative form and expression.

Mahasweta Devi is a bridge. She connects us to the tribal world and makes it accessible to us, the "non-tribals", the *Dikus*, the Hindus, the Brahmins, the English educated, urban middle classes. She does it not by creating a typology and by making them culturally visible as the "other", or as part of a class or caste or larger Dalit formation, not by infusing large amounts of compassion or sympathy or worse, but by becoming a part of the tribal world, its myths, songs, fears, sorrows, happiness, etc., in short, by empathizing with them. And simultaneously, she is also able to stand outside their world and give it a creative form. And this is the final form in which the experience communicates itself to the reader. Both the experience and its creative form, the aesthetic organization are equally important in making the tribal world accessible to us. Thus even though Mahasweta Devi modestly claims that she merely documents, her works are powerful creative representations of a culture and a people who figure in the imagination of the urban educated classes as tribal "types"—*junglee*, primitive people who live in trees like animals at one end of the spectrum, or bohemian, beautiful, organic, environment-friendly at the other.

While radical activists, anthropologists and social scientists may interpret, analyze, categorize and draw their own conclusions from the available data on tribals, Mahasweta Devi's creative works transcend all such approaches. I shall argue that precisely because of her aesthetic stance, Devi's works question and demolish many of the popular myths and stereotypes that have grown up around the tribal communities in India. These types have been created as much by uninformed middle classes as by "indigenist" radical scholars and activists who have projected them as the pre-eminent expressions of a subaltern consciousness (Spivak 1987: 241–68). Reading *Aranyer Adhikar* (1979) or *Chotti Munda and his Arrow*[2] is an experience in itself. For what Devi does is not merely narrate; she recreates the experience even as it is in the process of being created for the Mundas or the Shabars. One cannot even call it the ringside view, for the writer herself enters the experience and then recreates it in its immediate experiential reality. This creative process has its roots in the mythification of history by the tribals themselves. Without a script, all events, incidents, experiences, all history is transmitted, communicated, shared and stored in the form of songs, i.e. orally. This identification between myth and history is

[2] Devi as translated and introduced by Chakravorty Spivak (2002a). All references to the book are from this edition. Page numbers follow quoted passage in the text.

the process that she attempts to recreate in her fiction. How do Birsa Munda, Dhani Munda and Chotti Munda become myths in their own life time? And even more importantly how do they themselves respond to their eulogization in these songs? Is myth-making a distinctive process that is germane to the tribal imagination? Or can they recognize the gap between myth and reality?

Ami Itihaas bolchi—this is what a Shabar once told her in Akarbaid. Devi fictionalizes a history, but the fictionalization is not a fabrication; rather it creates a resonance of experiential authenticity, which is perhaps difficult to come across in anthropological or historical works. Given the orality of tribal society it is also relevant to consider her works as an archive of tribal history, an archive which does not consist of documented papers but a living archive of memories, songs and events long gone by.

CHOTTI MUNDA AND HIS ARROW

If *Aranyer Adhikar* is centered around the charismatic and heroic figure of Birsa Munda and the Ulugulan (the Uprising) and located in colonial times, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* takes the story into the postcolonial era, via the figure of Dhani Munda, an acolyte of Birsa, who carries his legacy forward in time and bequeaths it to Chotti. Of the three, Chotti is perhaps the most complex character since he becomes an intersecting point for history and myth, a symbol and legend for the Mundas, as well as an individual who is only too painfully aware of his frailties and responsibility of guiding his community through a complex and intricate web of political and economic pressures in a modern world. The dialectic between Chotti—the down to earth, but farsighted individual who carefully negotiates his community through a treacherous path laid out by the unholy trinity of the moneylender/landlord, the trader/industrialist and the "gormen" (the State)—and his magical arrow inherited from Dhani Munda is what makes the novel a *tour de force* among Mahasweta Devi's creative works. The bow and the "feisty" magical arrow is Dhani's legacy to Chotti, a legacy that seeks to continue the tradition of violent tribal resistance initiated by Birsa Munda. This fictive continuity that the writer builds on merges into another kind of continuity, the continuity of oppression. In her interview with Spivak, Devi says: "Tribal history is not seen as a continuity in Indian historiography" (Devi 1990: x). Thus what she attempts to establish is both a historical and fictional continuity through the figures of Dhani and Chotti Munda.

Modes of Resistance

If the history of exploitation is perceived as continuous, the modes of resistance are not necessarily so. At the beginning of the novel when Dhani Munda has been coaxed into teaching the young Chotti his archery skills, he tries to

communicate the "real instruction". Eighty-one years old in 1915, Dhani is a disappointed and broken man.

> Dhani realizes that the times when he lived a real life are now past. Mundas are agricultural by blood. Dhani was never that. The fight was to wrench a peaceful life for one's kin, but the goal of the battle was never fulfilled. Let's teach Chotti. Chotti, let me thread you to the tales and sayings of Munda life by teachin' ye to pierce the straw man. [The straw man is used for target practice in the lesson.] (2002a: 19)

But quite unexpectedly, the pupil questions the need for violence. "Why must one kill people from time to time (2002: 19)?" And to augment his objection he also points out that all the efforts of his predecessors have yielded nothing. And even though Dhani persists in stressing the continuity of oppression ("All t'reasons remain, Chotti.") and the need to kill, the alternative framework of resistance is suggested in the very question of Chotti.

"Throughout the book you'll see, Chotti is never raising his arrow to kill anyone, he is basically a civilized, polite person. If we think of what Gandhi means, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, tribals have it" (Devi 2000b: xxii). While the author merely mentions some of the Gandhian qualities that Chotti Munda possesses, the book elaborates a complex Gandhian approach too. While Chotti does not perhaps have any notion of class, he does recognize quite early in his life that solidarity between people whose suffering is caused by similar factors does impart strength to resist. Unity, the solidarity between Mundas, Dasuds, Ganju and Kurmi against the moneylender/landlord/police/political party nexus is consistently forged throughout the book. Chotti repeatedly thwarts any attempt by the powerful landlord to drive a wedge between the Mundas and the "lower castes". He threatens Tirathnath with a boycott, when the latter attempts to divide the Mundas by giving loans only to a few. Although Chotti's family is not denied the loan, he realizes his role as a leader, who needs to keep the solidarity of his group intact and refuses any preferential treatment. Similarly, when he is able to organize a large labour force for Harbans, the forest contractor, simply because of his position in the community, he refuses the blandishment of a higher wage or a cut from the others' wages.

The first instance of his sagacity concerns his refusal to allow anyone to become a bonded laborer to Tirathnath, the moneylender, in return for money or food during a drought. Getting all the lower castes and the Mundas together, he first tries to get the Daroga to report the famine to the concerned officer. But when this fails, he marches five miles to the district headquarters to petition the government. Although the survey officer also expresses his helplessness in getting them any aid immediately, he does send word to the Jain and Baptist Missions who bring much needed succour to Chotti's group. Chotti's resistance acquires significance for the Mundas because it proves that Chotti has access to the government. But for Chotti, it is a small victory in the fight for survival.

His moral authority over his people and his non-violent approach are quite evident in many other occasions too. He recognizes the futility of violence quite clearly. The government with their courts and the moneylender with his resources can obviously crush any Munda or Dasud resistance. Any direct or violent opposition can only provide yet another excuse for their suppression. The issue is how to negotiate a space within the exploitative and authoritarian system whereby the hold over them is loosened.

Nothing illustrates Chotti's creative, non-violent approach better than his engagement with Tirathnath when the latter decides to take away Harmu's and his brothers' half right to the land that they have made fertile literally by the sweat of their brow. Now that the barren stony land has been made fertile and its yield has gone up many times he wants to re-possess the land. He knows that he is violating an unwritten agreement, almost a tradition that has been established over many years. What he is attempting is to do away with "an older moral economy", in E. P. Thompson's words.

Chotti appeals to him and argues his case persuasively. He emphasizes the need to communicate and understand, even when Tirathnath is left speechless and rudely tells him, "Ye don't understand, Chotti". Chotti, "with intense heartbroken passion" says, "So y'er our lord, no? We never hear that we understan'. So lord, make us understan'. Let's see if Munda understan's Diku-talk. Tell, tell me? [...] Make me understan', Munda doesn' read, so how does he know worda mouth won' stand true" (2002a: 155)? What is fascinating is that deep down Tirathnath does recognize "that he was not acting right". Even after giving his final verdict "That's it then", he continues to feel uncomfortable. "What had Tirathnath done? Once he'd told a Munda I give you this barren piece of land for half crop half right. No need to put it in writing. And today he's saying I'm taking that land. What's wrong with this? Tirathnath realized, his own mind is saying there's something wrong in this ..." (ibid.: 157) The moral pressure that Chotti exercises on Tirathnath stands out in sharp contrast to the latter's fear of his "arrer" on many other occasions. And while Tirath is ultimately not able to break out of his moneylender/landlord mentality, that small, momentary twinge of conscience is proof that Chotti's approach has made a difference.

The exchange between Chotti and the Naxal boy, whom he tries to save from the police, highlights how despite a common enemy, the two disagree on the mode of resistance. Chotti is anguished at the plight of such a young boy running away from the near certain death of an "encounter" with the police. When the young man outlines his violent programme of eliminating class enemies (the contractors and the moneylenders) and establishing a society free of oppression, the more experienced Munda expresses his doubts. "But do Mundas an' low castes get land where ye kill t'bosses? They're now landed" (ibid.: 225)? On getting a negative answer from the boy he drives home what

he has culled from his experience. "That's t'problem ... Me boy, that Harmu, went to je-hell on a land fight, an' I still didn' shoot an' arrer. Cos why, cos polis would a come and burnt our corner. If a Lala dies, 'nother Lala will come. Knowin' that I didn' raise me bow" (ibid.: 225). Thus what Chotti is fighting against is a system not an individual and this is precisely where the strength of his argument and his resistance lies. Unlike the Naxals who believe that killing moneylenders, contractors and government functionaries will end oppression, Chotti understands that it is more important and relevant to fight against the system that empowers the exploiters. His grasp of the intricate web of forces in modern society is far greater than that of the educated, urban political classes and many other contemporary political groups.

Chotti is also aware that sometimes a desperate man can be driven to violence, when pushed beyond a threshold. Dukhiya, a bonded labourer, is driven to desperation and kills the estate manager after the latter abuses and exploits him. His patience finally runs out when the manager attempts to snatch the basket of peppers that he has grown and is trying to sell. He cuts off his head knowing the consequences fully well. And even though Chotti cries in anguish, he realizes that "Even with the knowledge that the outcome is death, in order to remain right with oneself, the humans created by Haramdeo, having reached the twentieth century, must sometimes do certain things" (ibid.: 69) And he honestly acknowledges the violence within his own self. When his son, Harmu, is jailed for two years for injuring two men with his arrows, he says, "Harmu has saved me face. If he hadn' raised his, I'd have had to raise me bow, and I'da felled a few" (ibid.: 169). Chotti's opponents fear him, however, the Mundas respect him for what they consider his supernatural powers. But Chotti never kills anyone even in a fit of anger. In fact the one episode of his killing the wild boar, which finds prominence is related to his successful attempt to save the Daroga's life. And paradoxically enough the one time he raises his bow (or so he claims) is at the end of the novel when he takes upon himself the blame for the murder of the Youth League goons so that the police cannot get to the young Mundas (including his son Harmu), who have actually killed them. A protector of his community to the end, he never indulges in any violence even when provoked grievously, since he recognizes that the entire community would suffer on his account. And at the end, he takes upon himself the entire blame for a violent act in order to save the community from being victimized again. When the SDO expresses some doubt about Chotti's claim that he killed them since he is more than 80 years old at the time, Chotti invokes the spirit of his master, Dhani Munda, who had taught him not just archery, but had also let him into the "secret" of how the arrow was to be used to kill one's enemies. "Dhani Munda! I'm raisin' yer name an' shootin' yer arrer today. To stay true, meself to meself" (ibid.: 363). After which he shoots straight at the target. Dhani Munda like Dukhiya and Bisra had been true to his ideals and

aspirations. And there is a poetic justice in Chotti's being true to "meself", raising his bow not to kill, but to preserve.

A significant and fascinating transformation can also be witnessed in the community's perception of Chotti Munda. In the initial phase of his life they compose several songs about his superhuman feats of bravery, his "magical arrers" and how they can kill enemies hundreds of miles away. But with the passage of time they also begin to respect him for his wisdom and ability to influence their opponents apart from skillfully guiding them through the maze of political and legal wrangles that the Emergency unleashes upon them. In a revealing moment when Chotti tries to explain how the mind of Tirathnath works to Chhagan the leader of the "lower castes", the latter exclaims, "Ye understan' so much, not us". To Chotti expressing his helplessness despite his understanding, Chhagan says, "Ye're our eyes, our life, our arms too" (ibid.: 189). The Mundas too rely heavily on Chotti for advice. "It's against Sana's nature to think anything from bottom up. Many of them are like that, Chotti will do the thinking. The leader of the hopeless ..." (ibid.: 187) In the second half of the novel, which takes the reader through the period of the sixties and the seventies, and the Emergency when the Youth Leagues's goons as well as the IAD forces descend on the area of Chotti, there is not a single song that the Mundas compose about Chotti. Released from the burden of a difficult and violent legacy initiated by Birsa Munda, Chotti now comes to be recognized as a sagacious, intelligent and sensitive leader.

Cultural Identity and Notions of Legitimacy

It is worth pointing out that at least on two occasions the conflict with Lala Tirathnath is either caused by or exacerbated by words that hurt the Munda's pride intensely rather than as one might expect to what is generally perceived as the more substantive issue of economic and political exploitation. When Baijnath sarcastically calls Bisra (Chotti's father) the "Mundas' moneylender" because he is doing well, he does not realize the hornet's nest that he has stirred. "Call us moneylender, Lord? Munda borrows but doesn' lend. Doesn't suck his brother's blood by moneylendin'. You've abused me" (ibid.: 32). This leads to a major crisis as the Mundas, smarting at the insult, collectively refuse to work on Baijnath's fields. It takes a particularly ugly turn when the new and inexperienced Daroga comes and arrests Bisra believing that he is the troublemaker. While Baijnath does feel somewhat relieved at the punishment, he also gets increasingly worried. "Chotti is not yet such a lawless place that the adivasi-untouchable has to be curbed with lawsuits" (ibid.: 36). By involving the police, he realizes that he has allowed the power over the tribals to shift to another person. And given that he has shared a working relationship with them in which he has always held the upper hand, he quickly tries to undo the damage by getting Bisra released. The damage is, however, done and Bisra later goes on

to commit suicide in a depressed state because of his public humiliation. On another occasion Tirathnath abuses Harmu and the Mundas by calling them "sonofbitches" and cheats like the Kurmi Mundas who had borrowed money from him, become his bonded labourers and then run away to the Christian Mission. Tirath's plan is to create a split within the Munda ranks by giving loans selectively. Chotti is enraged as much by the Lala's partiality as by the abusive language he has used. Losing his temper, he tells Tirathnath, "Ye s'd take back that 'sonuvabitch' word. We've done nothin' sonuvabitch. We won' take loan with this bad name ..." (ibid.: 132). And when the Mundas refuse to budge, Tirath realizes that he has gone too far and retracts. Dispossessed, exploited and bonded for generations, the Mundas still pride themselves on their honesty and sense of fairness. Like all poor and exploited people, the Mundas too put a high value on their self-respect and dignity. What is unique is that for them this dignity is related to their fundamental honesty and they will not allow anyone to cast aspersions on their integrity.

Acceptance of their responsibility even for a murder is yet another cultural norm related to identity. After killing the manager, during the trial, the lawyer provided by the State finds it impossible to persuade Dukhiya to tell a lie to save his skin. "Why s'd I say 'I didn' kill him, killed him in front of a hunnert people. I took red pepper to market, why did he push the basket with a shove of his shoe? In t'cities and towns other kinds of people kill and run. Just Munda-Oraon-Ho, I've never seen them run" (ibid.: 70). For Dukhiya the insult of the manager together with his daily and limitless exploitation is reason enough to justify the killing and he looks down on the city-bred who kill and run. On perceiving the entire affair from Dukhiya's point of view one becomes aware of how notions of legitimacy of their rights influence both self perception of identity and consequent action.[3]

Chotti Munda: The Myth and Reality

One of the central ironies in the novel is the apparent contradiction between Chotti the legend and Chotti the individual. His opponents fear him and the Mundas respect him for what they consider his supernatural powers. The veneration of Chotti begins quite early when his supremacy in archery becomes evident in the competition at the fair. Stories grow up about the "spell" in his arrow of which he is completely unaware. And when Koel wonders why Chotti has to "practise t'arrer like mad ever'day" when he has "got a spellbound arrer",

[3] Modern forms of exploitation like cuts from the wage, for instance, are much more objectionable to the Mundas than *betkari*, unpaid labour for the landlord. The latter form has almost become a part and parcel of their life and perhaps they cannot be mobilized around the issue even though they recognize the inherent injustice involved. Mridula Mukherjee has shown how the peasantry reacts to those forms of injustice that are linked to historical notions of legitimacy (2004: 466–99).

Chotti peremptorily replies, "That practisin' is t'spell" (ibid.: 31). When Bisra, Chotti's father, commits suicide and Chotti accuses the Daroga of humiliating his father, he keeps quiet because he fears Chotti's anger. And when by sheer chance Baijnath dies and the Daroga takes leave because of recurring fever, everyone concludes that Chotti is indeed "very powerful". But Chotti laughs it off. "Very powerful but can't fill five bellies" (ibid.: 48). But after sometime when the stories of Chotti's feats multiply, "because one can't shadow-box with folktales Chotti admits defeat and keeps up archery practice in the nooks and crannies of work in the field" (ibid.: 48).

But even if other Mundas are credulous, Chotti himself never succumbs to any of the outrageous myths that the community builds up around him. When he kills the wild boar and saves the Daroga from certain death, the latter lifts the ban he had imposed on Chotti's archery in an attempt to divert the attention of the community away from Chotti. The Mundas immediately make up a song about the whole episode.

> Ye picked a blade of grass
> Grass became spear
> Ye pierced t'boar
> He died right away
> And Daroga?
> He said, Go ye brave man,
> Join all games
> I was punished in this way
> Cos I banned your play. (Ibid.: 104)

And Chotti, true to himself, tells his wife, "A blade o' grass turns inta spear, but if I don' plough Tirath Lala's field, I've nothing to eat" (ibid.: 104). And under his breath he whispers to his sleeping infant daughter, Sukhni, "Yer ears will hear songs about yer pa. Yer eyes will see yer pa livin' on three rupees daily wage and a snack, ploughin' Lala's field" (ibid.: 105).

The contestation between violent and non-violent modes of resistance parallels Chotti's constant attempts to subvert his own mythification, separate the myth from the reality. When someone objects to his participation on account of his "magic arrow", Chotti demystifies everything by hitting the target with borrowed bows and arrows.

What then are the broad generalizations that one can draw from this reading of *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*?

Firstly, violence is not a given in tribal protest. There are many other modes of resistance that can be employed depending upon contexts and situations. Solidarity with the "lower castes", the refusal to forget how tribal exploitation has carried over from colonial to postcolonial times, memories of which are enshrined in their songs, are some of the ways tribals offer resistance in the novel. But perhaps what is notable is how their struggle is carried on in their

everyday life. When one thinks of tribal resistance one thinks of a rebellion, but in this novel the story deals with the resistance of a people during peacetime, the everyday forms of resistance, "the weapons of the weak", in the words of James Scott (1985). The struggle is no longer a Great Uprising like the Hul of the Santhals or the Ulugulan of Birsa Munda, but a series of small acts of defiance—a collective refusal to work in the fields of the moneylender, absence from work, negotiation for a higher wage or a small amount for meals, etc. And while in the novel the movement for national liberation figures fleetingly and seems to pass the tribals by, Chotti's non-violent struggle to wrest, however, small a space from the *Dikus* through negotiation and moral pressure in the struggle for empowerment, connects the tribals to the larger struggle against the colonial state and its allies.

Secondly, modernity has made irreversible inroads into the life of the tribals. Myths and a memory of the past sustain and encourage them in difficult times, but there is a clear recognition that times have changed. Chotti foresees a time when the Mundas will be Mundas, and will shoot arrows only on festivals.

Thirdly, the novel also subverts, exposes and debunks the monolithic stereotypes of tribals that have been neatly packaged and repackaged by communalists, radical activists, feminists, environmentalists and others. There is no one standard TRIBAL response to exploitation. At the individual level the response is diverse and varied. For instance some tribals decide to go off to the Christian Mission and get converted in a bid to escape from the clutches of the moneylender. Conversion appears more as a pragmatic act than a cultural violation, though Chotti certainly seemed pained by it. Becoming a Christian does not necessarily mean a complete break with the tribe or community.

The significance of Mahasweta Devi's novel lies in its subtle subversion of the many myths and stereotypes that have been created about tribals, not the least of them being violence as a marker of their subaltern status (Guha 1983: 4). What Devi does is to reveal the contemporary world of the tribals, intersected by a colonial past, the postcolonial present and perhaps their hazy vision of a future. And in doing so she expresses the great truth of all art, that human beings can never be truthfully and completely represented as categorized.

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22

Narrating Tribal Entity
Mavelimantam, Kocharethi, Ooralikkudi

Asha Susan Jacob
St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry, Kerala, India

In the postcolonial period tribal experiences have engendered a prolific and powerful body of literature, both in the West and the East. The dialectic of place and displacement forms the core of tribal literature. It is through the appropriation of power invested in writing that the marginalized takes hold of the marginality imposed on it. It is not the language, the tone and rhythm of it that matters (as Narayan says in defence of his writing *Kocharethi*), but writing itself. The invasion of the oral world by the written world has enabled the process of self-assertion and reconstruction of history.

This chapter proposes to compare and contrast the tribal pattern of life as portrayed in three novels in Malayalam (the language of Kerala)—*Mavelimantam* (by K. J. Baby) and *Kocharethi* and *Ooralikkudi* (both by Narayan). Adivasi[1] life is viewed from two different, yet converging perspectives—one an outsider representing the marginalized and the other an insider, yet with a difference, externalizing the internal.

Mavelimantam

Mavelimantam, a work based on the lives of the Adiyars, the adivasis of Wynad, northern Kerala, recreates the glorious past of the *mantam* (nation) and its later marginalization with the advent of "culture" and "civilisation". It is built on the argument that adivasi people were invaded by the Aryans, who eventually displaced them geopolitically. Viewed from the perspective of those who are pushed aside from their space and power, it is not different from the story of the nation. The novel begins with a barter system in which the Adiyars and

[1] "Adivasi" (from the Sanskrit *adi* which means "first" or "original" + *vasi* which means "inhabitant" or "dweller") is the term used in most Modern Indian Languages for Aboriginals.

Paniyans[2] could be transacted as commodities. The protagonist defines himself as Adiyan "an object, an animal, a slave that can be bought, sold or pawned by the master" (2003: 18). Baby tries to uncoil the history of Mavelimantam and the myths and rituals associated with it. There are two disparate responses to colonization. While the old chief stands for his *mantam* and yearns for nothing other than unity, the present leader acts as an agent of the colonizer, a native spy, effectively and cunningly exploited by the settler to intimidate the natives. The old chief reminds the people of "the glorious past when there were no Adiyars and Paniyans, no Nairs and Namboodiries" (ibid.: 28) and how the craftiness and cunning of these *thamburans* (masters) displaced the adivasis from their soil[3]. Social power operates through dominion over terrain. The loss of territorial authority to the domineering mainstream alienated the adivasis from their domain, converting them into slaves or Adiyans. It is through their myths, legends, songs and dances that their history is recreated and communicated to posterity. The guileless Mavelimantu (king) was deceived and when he demanded return of his land, they desecrated it by spilling his blood. People were forced into slavery and with the introduction of the caste system they lost their fraternity. Thus we witness two generations of Adiyans and *thamburans* in two different spaces and times, but the disparities do not reveal any difference in their attitudes. Kaipaddan observes, "masters are the same everywhere. So also the slaves" (ibid.: 63).

Baby delves deeper into the strategy of exploitation. The tribals live through their *thudies* (drum beats) and the masters use the same beats to urge their spirits for more production. The "Kambalam" associated with farming is exploited as a strategic device to make them work more: "By taking their ritual *thudi* to the field, one can make ten people finish the work in five days which normally takes ten men and ten days" (ibid.: 70). Kambalam offers Kaippadan an opportunity to escape from his exiled environment. His exit unites the *thamburans*. The allies now act together in hunting the dangerous runaway slave. When the new manager (*kittan*) kills the old master to pave way for the usurper, Kaippadan, the slave is accused and his people are hunted and tortured.

In the colonial context "development" means the development of the colonizer at the cost of the colonized. Agriculture has become agribusiness. The *moopan* (chief) complains: "Never allow us to settle. After every work we shifted. Each of these shiftings expanded the fields of the *thamburans*. Plantations expanded" (ibid.: 65). Frantz Fanon, contrasting the settler town and the native town, says the native town is hungry, dirty, "not spacious, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of cola, of light" (Fanon 2001: 30). The Adiyars are also forced to live in crowds, to meet and mate there.

2 Adiyars, Paniyans, Ooralis and Arayans are among the many tribes of Kerala.

3 While adivasis belong to the lower social strata, the Nair and Namboodiris are "upper caste" Hindus.

The dominant culture need not be the superior culture. The *mantam* is unadulterated by the patriarchal ideology of man over woman, or man over nature. Phallocentric culture considers nature and woman as the Other, external objects, created for the male. Together with domination over and ownership of soil and *mantam*, the new masters have gained domination over their bodies as well. Not only the nation, but its women too become vassals to the rich. The production of labour and the production of children are determined by the master, as more slaves are needed by the British to work in the mountains. The women are reduced to factories for the production of labourers. They are forced not only to surrender their bodies, but also to witness the sale of their children.

Imperialism has brought with it deforestation and mindless consumption of natural resources. In the world of natives, the living and the non-living, the human and the non-human merge, and are bound to each other. The natural elements and the natives witness atrocities committed against nature in the guise of development. To make way for plantations, they make the mountains bald. Both the landscape and the women are raped, desecrated and despoiled.

Every culture is tainted by external influences. The marginal culture recedes and gets diluted by the dominant. The centre not only displaces them spatially, but infiltrates into their linguistic realm as well. Peruman laments the impending loss of the beauty and charm of their culture and language through external influences. The natives imitate the contaminated language of the masters. What was profane has become a fashion in the craze to imitate the dominant culture. The problem becomes graver in the case of oral tradition with no facility to preserve the language.

The native is forced to choose between rebellion or servitude. Kaippadan's escape changes their attitude. The pressure that is gradually built up is released. While every previous attempt of escape had been subverted in myths, Karippadan's escape instils hope in everyone, giving them the strength to endure. There is a marked change in their perspective. Their newly gained harmony helps them create their own space even while living in the world of the *thamburan*. The attempt to make new songs heralds the resurrection of their *mantam*—a world where there are no lies, fears or inequality; a world that offers a new heaven and earth for the whole community. They become human beings capable of deciding for themselves.

KOCHARETHI

Moving from *Mavelimantam* to *Kocharethi*, we witness the transition of the natives from their biocentric pre-colonial views and practices to the postcolonial competition for survival by means of agricultural capitalism, which has threatened not only their ecological base, but also their cultural viability as

a commune. Unlike Baby in *Mavelimantam*, Narayan in *Kocharethi* does not attempt a historical analysis of the adivasis as an outsider, but from his own experiences as an Arayan. He speaks about what he has witnessed, and also how that culture gets adulterated by encounter with other cultures. Narayan admits that the adivasis presented on the screen and paper are far removed from reality.

Depicting a life in close association with nature, and one that is complete in itself without any interactions with the world outside, *Kocharethy* is a brilliant account of the life and nature of Arayan society. Casting together two generations of Arayans, Narayan commences by dwelling on their wedding rites. It is always marriage between cousins—Kunjadichan marries Pappy, his first cousin. His sister's marriage is arranged with Kochuraman, an outsider, but everything has to match—*illam*, *mura*, etc. "Arayan girls are not reluctant to kill those who try to molest them or they will commit suicide" (1998: 17), Kunjipennu declares to Narayan who tries to force her into marriage. Arayans have five *illams*—Chokkayillam (that of the excommunicated), Valayillam, Poothanayillam, Modalakkattillam, Nellippuillyillam—and marriage is allowed only between particular *illams*. Children belong to their mother's *illam*. The house also belongs to the woman married into the family. They make *erumadams* (tree houses) from which they can keep watch on their crops to protect them from wild animals. There is an *eettappera* where women stay during their menstruation (seven days) and maternity.

Identity for the Arayans is associated with their proximity to nature or land. Their addresses are by trees, stones like Varikkamakkil, Elanjimoottil, etc. They live in harmony with their environment. When they kill small game, a portion is set apart for elders and relatives. Even when they reap, they pray asking for forgiveness for cutting the crop.

Victims of fire during summer and landslides during monsoon, they have to mortgage property. Poverty makes them permanent debtors. Kunjumothalali stakes his two acres for Rs 200 and 10 kgs of rice and dried tobacco. Branding them as destroyers of forests, the head guard of the forest and his agents order the Arayans to report to them with the things collected from the forest. They are told not to clear much forest or kill animals, because the forest belongs to the *thamburan*. Listening to them, one feels that the Arayans and Ooralis survive on the *thamburan*'s mercy. The conversion of natural forests into reserve forests has destroyed the very basis of tribal economy.

Traders exploit the Arayans, who barter pepper and coffee for household items. Ignorant about money and measurement, they are cheated. On the one hand, their yield of crops is claimed by the raja's employees, and on the other hand by the agents of the Devaswam (ibid.: 97), for it is claimed that the hills and forests belong to Aiyappan (a Hindu god). Like other adivasis they also tell a poignant tale of deceit, which deprived them of their glorious

past as soldiers of the Karikkottu raja. With the arrival of the Pillais they were forced to seek refuge in the hills, which gained them the name of Malaarayan.

"For Malaarayans, life is always a struggle, never victorious, always defeated, a struggle to live in pain" (ibid.: 112). When they rise phoenix-like from natural calamities, they become victims of deceit and cunning of the mainstream. In the name of felling trees from the property, their crops are destroyed. Those who complain are threatened by the police. They are often told that the land belongs to the government. Their revolt is suppressed with brutal police force. The realization of the need for unity forces Krishnapillai to declare that the Arayan and Oorali need not give anything to any official as they do not own land. It is by revolting against the existing patterns that every society enters into modernity. Feudal landlords, government, law and the police terrorized them. Besides the wild animals and diseases they have to face still greater animals—humans. These confrontations lead to the realization of the need for education.

Education is an instrument of social change. It may help conserve traditions, act as an agent of change and become an operative force in introducing social change. Introduced to figures and letters by Kochupillai Asan (teacher), they are hopeful of a new dawn, though some still follow the familiar path of liquor. New values and practices are adopted, new languages are learnt. The first wave of the independence struggle reaches Arayakudi too, first through school. They fail to understand that the kings no longer rule. With a new government in place, the scheduled tribes are given free education and Kochuraman Vaidyan becomes a respectable Arayan.

The novel also narrates how, under Pentecostal influence, some Arayans have become Christian (though even after conversion they carry the prefix "Arayan", as in Arayan Peter. Many people embraced Christianity to escape their sufferings, but they are still seen in a different light, as "new Christians".

The educated elite take up urban occupations and migrate to cities and to a lifestyle which alienates them from the old. The old systems collapse and new ones arise. Parvathy decides to marry the man of her choice, dashing all her father's hopes. With the advent of summer, life again becomes tragic. People migrate. Kochuraman becomes addicted to arrack. He, who knew and practised herbal medicine, is forced to take asylum in the medical college. But the transfer terrifies him, and they are forced to mortgage land to meet the cost of his treatment. Apprehension of the impending operation compels them to quit the hospital. With the educated and employed Parvathy and her husband, they enter a new phase of hope and happiness.

Ooralikudi

The Ooralis are perhaps the most backward and the most exploited among the adivasis of Kerala. Even in an era of technological advancement, a world apart from mother forest is unthinkable for them. A lot of rituals and superstitions still exist because of their reluctance to embrace education. Narayan's *Ooralikudi* deals with the large-scale encroachment on their land and its legitimization by the corrupted brain and the brawn of the mainstream.

Until recently, when restrictions on forest clearing were imposed, the Ooralis never settled in one place because they cultivated only virgin soil. They had only makeshift houses—*anamadams* and *erumadams*.

Like the Adiyans and Arayans, Ooralis also have a sad story to tell of how their king was forced to surrender the sceptre and crown. They were allowed to settle with conditions—never establish in a place, no repeated farming, never nurse a woman during her pregnancy—which led to their destruction. Their numbers are small because of high neonatal mortality. Women have to deliver without any help, in the separate *pettumadam* with God alone to protect them for three weeks.

The novel tells us how these people, who failed to resist external forces were victimized. The land, which is left fallow after one crop, is given to anyone who asks for it, because Ooralis never deny anyone anything. Narayan shows the gradual deterioration of Ooralikudi with the advent of outsiders.

Komban and Kolumban decide on the marriage of their children. Marriage is always in the form of an exchange. A boy with no sister will not get a wife, and the future of the brotherless daughter is decided by the elders. Kurichy is married to Charan. The girl's consent is not needed for marriage. There are no rituals when Kurichy is given to Charan. With the sickle given as dowry, they make their own *anamadam* and get tubers from the forest. A bamboo stick and some dry leaves placed alongside ensure that no one else will claim them. That is the law of the forest (1999: 17). The best portion is given to Kurichy, for nothing bad is to be given to others, especially to the wife (ibid.: 18). A *pettumadam* is made for women to stay in during their menstruation. When a new house is built, the *pilathy* (senior *Mantravadi*) has to block the evil spirits. Kurichy is alone in the *pettumadan*. If anyone visits it, severe punishment follows. Cases have been reported where a tiger ate both the mother and child. The husband is not allowed to see the child for fourteen days from its birth.

If a woman loses a child in the *pettumadam*, she has to bury it herself. The pregnant Velumbi's husband leaves her, accusing her of infidelity. She dies at childbirth. Narayan comments: "If these women were allowed some companionship during this period they would not have died in such huge numbers" (ibid.: 40). A man can have more than one woman (in different houses). If a woman dies at childbirth, the man can remarry. However, no

karmas (rites) take place for Velumbi. Velumbi's child is adopted by Kurichy. She is different from the other Oorali women, who tie their children on their back and go for digging, which they have picked up from experience.

Communal life is of a crucial importance to tribal communities. Before individual farms are cultivated they work together to prepare the land. During the months of scarcity both men and women beg. That is life for those who do not stock up for the future (ibid.: 27). But Charan is different from the other Ooralis, who usually consume toddy and *ganja*.

Manikyan has a fatal fall trying to catch fish (ibid.: 31). For his burial they dig a *thoni* in the *kudi* graveyard. After bathing and clothing the corpse, some twigs are placed in the grave, a bamboo sapling is placed over them, and the body is lowered to the accompaniment of mantras chanted by the *pilathy*. To protect others from the spirit, at the head of the grave, three stones along with an old pot full of water and some rice are placed (ibid.: 33).

The Oorali had a glorious past on the banks of the river Periyar. They were rich and valiant. Deceitful *mannans* defeated them by witchcraft, and those who remained were forced to live under certain conditions imposed on them (ibid.: 56).

Repeated clearing has thinned the dense forest. Population has increased and tubers and bees have become less abundant. But the Ooralis do not care. Whatever they produce or collect are snatched away by the traders. The Ooralis also borrow money from these traders. With no idea of accounts, they are always cheated and are perpetually in debt.

Charan, realizing that they are exploited, sends his community children to school. But the disparity between them and others is very evident. Most of them go astray with no proper dress, no food, no guidance and above all, they are discriminated against by their teacher. The increasing number of school dropouts is the reason for tardy literacy rate. Children often choose the life of a cowherd or a helper as that at least ensures a livelihood. The situation is aggravated by the fact that often primary education is not imparted thereby resulting in increased inhibition about new knowledge in another language.

The credulous Ooralis often allow outsiders to settle among them. Sometimes the government officials too put pressure on the Ooralis to allow outsiders to settle in the territory earmarked for them. They do so either by giving them low wages, or by offering them bribe. Land that is allocated for them in the east is taken from them with a mere thumb impression. They are forced to labour in their own fields. With the introduction of education there has been a marked shift in the attitude of the youngsters. They rebel against their parents and tradition, and often end up in misery and disillusionment. The elders blame education for the disaster.

Their traditional lifestyle is threatened when an outsider rapes and kills a girl in the *pettumadam*. The incident ignites thinking about them. But with

no leadership, and no harmony between traditionalists and modernists, they become victims.

The land-grabbing outsiders, like Kuttichen, are not unwilling to instil rivalry among the Ooralis. Kuttichen kills one of them and the blame falls on an innocent Oorali. It is a planned murder to usurp the land of the other. With their united strength, the settlers manage to influence the police. When Raghavan is murdered the adivasis have to flee for fear of being tormented. A woman gets molested. There is no bail for Balan, the accused, as he does not own land. "An adivasi Oorali may be the custodian of a thousand acres, but owns nothing. Since he is an adivasi the ownership of the land on which he lives is with the government" (ibid.: 112). One by one, Kuttichen kills the other members of the family and takes the woman (Thanka) as his concubine. With no male to protect her, Thanka boldly faces Kuttichen's attempt on her life.

When the settlers become planters, Ravi comments: "All except the Ooralis become rich. Oorali works for one day only. Traditions and customs destroy them" (ibid.: 116). Attempted evictions of the settlers are aborted by their united effort. Children get alienated from parents. Language loses its originality. They realize that times have changed, but people like Charan refuse to change. Instead of digging tubers they too start tapioca farming. But lack of skill along with natural calamities force them to be labourers. A lot of developments have come to the area, supposedly for the benefit of adivasis, but they remain where they were.

Tribal areas were not generating income until the arrival of the market economy. The entry of the land mafia and agents of the market economy interfered with the tribal way of life. Despite laws protecting their land and resources in postcolonial India, colonization and exploitation in various forms still continues. The mainstream tries to impose dominant cultural patterns, fosters intolerance of plurality and unleashes attacks upon cultural diversity.

The three novels discussed above have not been acclaimed as in-depth studies probing the labyrinthine corridors of the human psyche. Yet, they are seminal works, heralding the power of future writings emanating from the acquisition of education. The emergence of a unified mainstream attempts to throttle peripheral and diverse streams as well as the variety of lifestyles. Displacement, disorganization, destitution and the demise of tribal people are certain on account of "development". Extensive tribal areas have been devastated in the name of development with no gains accruing to the people in the absence of formal rights over the land. Uprooted tribals are ruthlessly exploited within their own territory. Sexual exploitation has become rampant. They are vulnerable to insidious operation of laws, crafty manipulation and sheer use of physical force by vested interests. Laws favouring adivasis always remain, like the mythological Thrisangu, in suspended animation, and are

interpreted to the disadvantage of the adivasis. No politician has done anything for them, as they are not a significant vote bank. The erstwhile owners of land are now landless, without even the right to bury their dead. The three novels do not offer any practical solutions to the postcolonial problems confronted by the tribals, but they open our eyes to the hitherto unexpressed or misinterpreted part of Kerala's social life.

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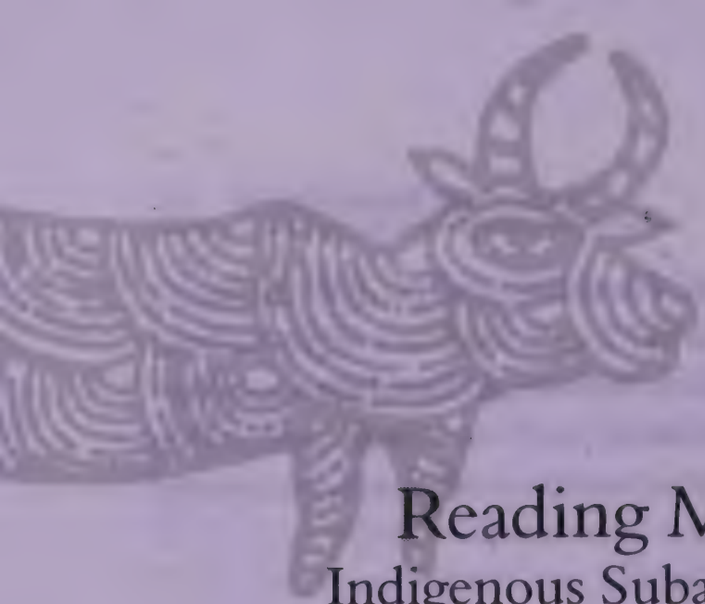

23

Reading Maracle's *Sundogs*
Indigenous Subalternity and Resistance

SHAILY MUDGAL
University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, India

Before even beginning to write on literature by Canadian indigenous writers, non-Aboriginal scholars are cautioned by Aboriginal academic Jo-Ann Episkenew:

> [...] non-Aboriginal scholars need to be cognizant of the authority that society accords their voices. It is inevitable, then, that their interpretations of Aboriginal literature will have an effect not only on the perceptions that non-Aboriginal people have of Aboriginal society but that Aboriginal people have of themselves. It is important that scholars examine the ideological baggage they bring to their readings and counter it by looking outside the texts into the contexts in which they were written to glean some kind of understanding of the ideology of the people whose works they interpret. (Eigenbrod and Episkenew 2002: 57)

As I move forward in my understanding and interpretations of Aboriginal literature, I keep reverting to Episkenew's statement on socially responsible criticism, and pay close attention to the socio-political, cultural and historical contexts of First Nations within Canada.

My approach involves attempts to question certain postcolonial assumptions and develop a method of reading native cultural productions. To my understanding, more specifically, I will examine how their fiction represents their endeavours for self-determination in the geo-political context of Canada, their modes of resistance to colonialism and neo-colonialism, and their acts of forging a literary tradition that embodies their oral tradition and history, while also engaging with the larger Canadian literary tradition. As writing subjects they play the role of agents registering their presence and contribution to Canadian life and literature, thereby reclaiming their individual and collective identity. Earlier, featured as written objects in writings by white writers, they were denied access to language and the opportunity to speak for themselves; and they were therefore typecast as "primitive" and

"savages". The production of these stereotypes reinforced the cultural myth of the indigenous peoples as a "Vanishing Race". Daniel Francis in his book, *The Imaginary Indian* (1992), says:

> If any single belief dominated the thinking about Canadian Aboriginals during the last half of the nineteenth century, it was that they would not be around to see much of the twentieth. Anyone who paid any attention at all to the question agreed that Natives were disappearing from the face of the earth, victims of disease, starvation, alcohol and the remorseless ebb and flow of civilizations. (1992: 23)

But the emergence of native writers on the Canadian literary landscape brought about major changes in the way native peoples and their literature is conceived, read and interpreted. Unsettling the normative ground of literary productions in Canada, Aboriginal writers like Lee Maracle open a space to resituate their dislodged and marginalized history and tradition in ways that are unique to indigenous culture.

Maracle, a Stó:lō writer, suggests that for a First Nations writer "the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction, and thus *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people" (1994: 7). The double act of "storying" and "story-telling" is both personal and political. As a manifestation of individual and collective identity, it at once reveals resistance to Eurocentric categories and transmits Aboriginal traditions and history. As non-Aboriginal writer Karen E. Macfarlane says:

> Working within the context of the written text, storying asserts its immediacy as narrative process, while playing out its alternate role as written artefact. Storying, then, as a verb, becomes interwoven with the static negotiations of the Western text. What results is a form of narrative that asserts the mutually constitutive relation between static (written) and dynamic (oral) forms of verbal interaction. (Episkenew 2002: 110)

As a medium of resistance to colonial practices, storying enables native writers to articulate their agency and to do so by defining their own terms of engagement with literature. Storying symbolizes Aboriginal peoples' struggle for representation in both the political and cultural arenas. Maracle invents stories that construct new notions of nation and community and establish new paradigms of resistance and solidarity. Indeed, the fact that *Sundogs* is set in the 1990s indicates her endeavour to portray and resist the Canadian government's attempts to marginalize natives and to encroach on their lands. Maracle's double concern, with the history of native and white relations and the legacy of colonialism, results in a narrative that embodies both the past and the present. Weaving together words of power, community and resistance to oppression, she contextualizes the Aboriginal struggle by simultaneously underscoring the

divide between natives and whites. While most English scholars today seem preoccupied with postcolonialism, Maracle feels: "Unless I was sleeping during the revolution, we have not had a change in our condition, at least not the Indigenous people of this land" (1992b: 12–15). Taking this as my entry point into the novel, I intend to trace the subaltern spaces that Aboriginals have been forced to occupy, which even today operate as sites of resistance and protest towards the lingering effects of colonization.

Sundogs, Lee Maracle's first novel (1992), is indeed a story wherein she narrates the lives of Aboriginal peoples affected by their struggle for territorial rights. The narrative of the novel revolves around the life and family of Marianne, the central character. The narrative takes place in an in-between space in which Marianne, just past her teens, finds herself caught in the tension between her own culture and that of mainstream Canadian society. She is the negotiator between two worlds—that of her home and native community, and that of the university she attends in Vancouver. The novel reveals Marianne as estranged both from her family and white society, a daughter who is unable to understand why her mother is frustrated and angry with the Canadian Prime Minister. Her inability to learn her native language in which her mother and siblings converse adds further to her estrangement. Marianne remains a loner both at home and at university. Amongst her classmates she is "too native", while in her community she is not "native enough". This ambivalence splits her personality and becomes a source of insensitivity and resentment towards her community, hampering her efforts to connect with the family. She is well aware of her cultural insufficiency that makes her a misfit within her family. As she confesses, "There are too many volumes of instruction missing in my life. The gap is bigger than mere urban blight. An entire context is missing. My whole cultural origins are absent" (1992a: 144). English education at school and university has kept her away from learning her own language and culture. Her ignorance of the native ways of living makes her feel like a "cultural cripple" or "cultural idiot".

Occupying that liminal position, that border space between the "white town" and her "native family", she becomes obsessed with noticing the differences between the two as she defines herself in relation to them. Her movement between the two worlds is affected by events that shape her experiences and define her understanding. Dorra, her six-year-old niece, who meets an untimely death, captures these conflicts which she would like to paint some day:

> I am going to paint a chasm, deep and dark travelling along a tornado path to white hot light. I am going to paint us young people clutching at the edges of the chasm, barely hanging on and our elders will stand away from the chasm with their backs half-turned. (Ibid.: 106)

Certainly, Dorra's painting reflects the chasm in which Marianne is caught, but it also promises a path that will eventually be illuminated for her to walk over and bridge her estrangement with other members of her family, and provide a trail for the young to follow. During the course of her life, Marianne gradually develops a sensibility that enables her to realize and embrace the sanctity of native traditions and life.

The other major character we are introduced to is Marianne's mother, who is outraged at the Canadian government's decision over native welfare and social service cutbacks. Marianne, on the other hand, just does not feel the same about it. She is rather ashamed of the "statistics" of native peoples often presented in her class. This feeling of shame puts her a step further away from her community. "The shame burns holes in whatever sympathy I may have for Indians" (ibid.: 3). Marianne shares little empathy with her community and fails to appreciate her mother's strong feelings of compassion for them: "I can't get past this, can't break through wondering why she is so sad about people she has never met. No one in our family is on welfare. How Momma could get so upset over welfare cutbacks is beyond me" (ibid.: 4).

Through Marianne's mother, Maracle deconstructs notions of nation, nationality and postcoloniality, and goes on to introduce new paradigms that demand engagement with indigenous constructs of communities, tribes, clans and peoples. She asks for a new praxis that fits their dimensions of resistance and subalternity. I say "subaltern" with a sense of unease because their power of community, from which they draw a circle of solidarity and sovereignty, hardly pushes them into a "subaltern" position. Because of such specificities, I confess, as does Helen Hoy, that reading any native texts, presents me first with the question of *how should I read these?* Because they break the binary of theory and criticism and provide a much wider context of creativity and criticism, I try to remain cautious when treading on the terrain of postcoloniality while approaching their texts. Also, being a cultural and geographical outsider, I might falter at some points, and very well miss the point at other places.

Sundogs focuses on both inter- and intra-tribal relations, along with their relationship with the settler community. We find Marianne as "particularly determined to re-search" her world. The whole plot is interwoven with intricate life patterns of native peoples, negatively affected by the white settler community. Rita and Bill's marriage, as well as Rudy and Paula's, is encumbered by their disappointments in the white world. Never-ceasing humiliation, discrimination and professional insecurity fills native men with a sense of desperation and failure, and this dangerously affects their personal lives. Marianne's boredom with the stereotyped, negative attitude of university instructors towards native learners becomes evident when her teacher casts suspicion regarding her "acute understanding of Mill's concept of utilitarianism". By now Marianne is well aware of the rarefied outlook of Western academia. "I have been hauling

ass across foreign terrain carrying two additional burdens on my back: racism and patriarchy. The instructors who tried to be liberal about women did not consider me a woman. I have been a Native, generic and sexless, for twenty years" (ibid.: 76).

In the preface to *Sojourner's Truth*, a collection of stories published in 1990, Maracle spells out her intention "to combine Native oratory with European story". Through *Sundogs* she not only practises oratory, which she describes as "theory presented through story" ("Oratory" 14), but also asserts her strategy to resist colonialism and mobilize the collective consciousness of her community. To extend and explicate her active engagement with literature, Maracle utilizes the plot of the Oka crisis to inform readers of the Canadian colonial ploy and containment of native land and life. She weaves in the historical episode of the crisis as a window into the politics of difference between whites and natives, and carries out her responsibility towards her community through strategies of storying and writing. Maracle lends her voice to Marianne and articulates, "I am no longer on the periphery of their world and cut off from mine; they are on the periphery of mine" (ibid.: 137).

The year 1990, (in)famous for Oka, stands out as a turning point in the political relations between the Canadian government and First Nations peoples. The Aboriginal population of Canada has long been engaged in their struggle for land claims. In 1961, amidst a state of tense relations between the two disparate groups, the municipality of Oka constructed a nine-hole golf course on traditional Kanien'kehá:ka territory, which was followed by large-scale destruction and uprooting of pine trees without any consultation with the Mohawks. On 1 April, 1989, the Kanehsatake community took out a protest march in opposition to the extension of the golf course on the ancestral burial ground of the Mohawks of Oka. Doubling the the size of the golf course and erecting condominiums would increase tax revenues for the government and the income of the developers, but it would also mean massive environmental destruction and desecration of the sacred Mohawk burial ground. In protest against this encroachment, the Mohawks erected barricades to reclaim their lands and insisted on resolving the land dispute on a Nation-to-Nation basis. Finally, a standoff ensued with the *Sûreté du Québec* (SQ), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and later the Canadian army arriving at the scene and inflicting a paramilitary assault upon the Mohawks.

During the course of the novel, Marianne undertakes the "Okanagan Run for Peace" to extend her solidarity and support to Mohawks fighting the SQ, the RCMP, and the Canadian Army:

> No wonder those men at Kanehsatake have armed themselves, armed themselves for our dead. Our dead constitute the lost potential of our race. They evidence our genocide. They represent the remnants of what might have been and never

> was—in their eternal sleep lies our grief, the grief that killed our will to live and love. (Ibid.: 159)

The whole commotion concerning the traditional burial ground at Oka brings Marianne to a renewed sense of appreciation for and affinity with indigenous culture and struggle:

> We are no longer victims, but people who have made a decision, established a direction for ourselves after what seemed like a century of floundering. I no longer want to wander in a direction different from them. In my mind, white men have become the rootless, the lost, and the ridiculous. Maybe it isn't upside down, maybe it has righted itself. (Ibid.: 137)

The visual imagery displayed through television makes Marianne and us, the readers, realize the "struggle for personal and psychological survival" of native men and women. As Marianne puts it:

> There are their weapons: organized violence, conquest by sword and musket, organized child stealing through the school system and the child welfare act, apprehension, terror, defamation of national character, racism, alcohol poisoning, imprisonment, hanging, language and cultural prohibition, total racial invalidation. And our weapons? We have but one-dogged insistence on truth. (Ibid.: 69)

Maracle, through her writings, challenges readers who are in their comfort zone, shaking them out of their ideological complacency with CanLit to establish a cultural dialogue and make them see the process of colonialism that still crushes native spirits. Through her literary activism, she asserts her strategy to resist colonialism and mobilizes the collective consciousness of the native community that is empowering in itself. Postcolonialism, as a discursive and critical methodology that looks into the cultural productions of the oppressed and the colonized, does not go well then with Aboriginal writing. First Nations writers resist the postcolonial implications that Canada is in fact now a postcolonial nation state. As Thomas King suggests in his article "Godzilla vs. Postcolonial" (1990):

> [...] the idea of postcolonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonisation, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression. (1990: 12)

Aboriginal writings help create a wedge between popular CanLit and the notion of a homogeneous national literature. As Helen Hoy says: "Using the weaponry of cultural difference, historical anomalies, Maracle situates through her narrative a political stance which is counter-hegemonic, resistant and transformative" (2001: 135). It is significant to note then that the lens of

postcoloniality will distort the reality and complexity of the native politics of resistance and representation. Therefore, native writers, like Thomas King and Lee Maracle, both create and demand new literary praxis for their specific texts and contexts.[1]

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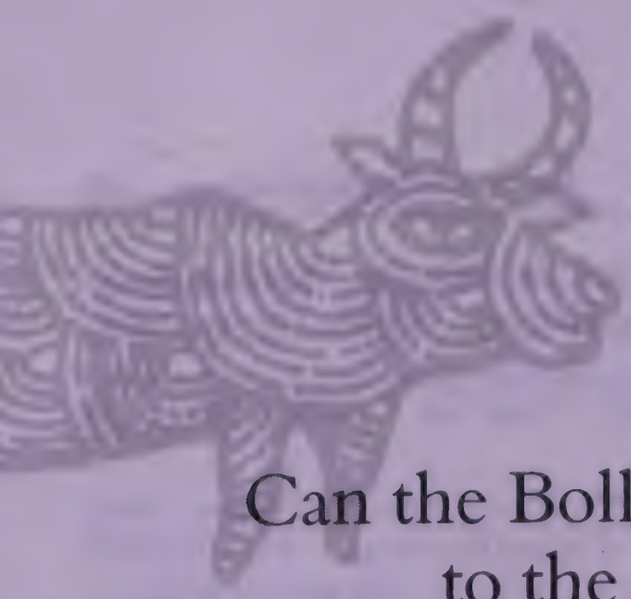

24

Can the Bollywood Film Speak to the Subaltern?

Ajay Gehlawat
Hutchins School of Liberal Studies
Sonoma State University, California, USA

From its inception in 1896, as Roy Armes notes, Indian cinema has been a travelling cinema—"travelling showmen established the first popular audience by taking films from place to place with their tent shows" (Armes 1987: 106). This trend has continued to the present and with 80 per cent of the population living in rural areas, it has resulted in a "uniquely regional" cinema (Pendakur 2003: 17). What is noteworthy, then, as Manjunath Pendakur points out, "is that the Hindi-language [Bollywood] films, which make up about 20 per cent of the total production … have captured the all-India market" (Pendakur 1990: 231). This is largely due to these films' commercial formulas, which are well-known and can generally be seen as transcending the (regional) language barrier" (ibid.: 231).

It is important to note that in a country where approximately 300 million are illiterate (Nayar 2004: 14), as stated in an early 1980s British documentary, "Even the remotest parts of India aren't free from Bombay's fantasy world. Travelling cinemas visit distant fairs in villages, often with illegally pirated prints."[1] What is interesting here is the negative stance taken toward this "fantasy world", i.e. positioning it as a threat to Indian villagers' freedom. Such a position is compounded by opposing the cinema to the regional theatre, which "bravely combat[s] his mechanical rival", but which "cannot compete today with the travelling cinema".[2]

The cinema, then, is a threat to both the current freedom of Indians (particularly in villages) and its predecessor, the theatre. Indians who watch

[1] *There'll Always Be Stars in the Sky: The Indian Film Music Phenomenon*, produced and directed by Jeremy Marre, Harcourt Films, 1983.

[2] Ibid.

Bollywood participate in a mass hypnosis of sorts, one that deprives them of their culture and their volition. The Indian cinema is seen as lacking maturity and, by inference, so does its audience. And yet, as the same critics will point out, "to the vast conglomerate mass that makes up the Indian public the cinema is the only form of available inexpensive entertainment" (Ray 1976: 72). Furthermore, it is clear that "if you think in terms of tired untutored minds with undeveloped tastes needing an occasional escape through relaxation", then "the best prescription" becomes the Bollywood film precisely as it has been formulated, namely, as simple, escapist fare for "tired untutored minds" (ibid.: 73).

A rather circular form of argument should have become apparent by now. On the one hand, it is the Indian viewer's mentality that is to blame for Bollywood; on the other, it is the industry that mass-produces these "fantasies" that "delude" the masses. Either way, it seems, the best thing to do is leave well enough alone—but not, of course, before passing judgement on both. Sheila Nayar declares, "Bombay cinema—often has the feeling of being piecemeal and disaggregative, of being coarsely stitched together. It is pastiche—*but quite without the postmodern self-consciousness*" (Nayar 2004: 16, emphasis mine). The reason for this is the aforementioned symbiosis in which the viewer and the film hold each other down—how can the cinema have a consciousness when it is made for illiterate villagers? Never mind that the structure of the films themselves seems to present an alternative possibility. It is useful to remember that when Satyajit Ray came across an American critique of Hindi films' use of songs "as a sort of Brechtian device, something which purposely makes the spectator aware of the artificiality of the whole thing", his response was to question whether "the film makers themselves think of the songs in these terms" (Ray 1976: 73).

On the flip-side of this paradigm, one finds the serious consideration of this cinema possible but, again, only within an antediluvian frame. Nayar, for instance, insists on seeing the Bollywood cinema as "historically circumscribed by the psychodynamics of orality—that is, by the thought processes and personality structures that distinguish a non-writing mindset" (2004: 14). Unfortunately, however, what still remains unnoticed and unconsidered are the psychodynamics of *film* literacy, particularly via the Bollywood *masala* aesthetic. Even if one does not possess what Roland Barthes called a "writerly" mindset,[3] one can still know how to read a film. When the critic presents the illiterate Indian villager as "an oral person" (ibid.: 15), the essentializing binarism resurfaces. According to Nayar, "An oral person absorbs and organizes, and retains and recalls, information differently. For instance, he or she cannot organize thoughts with syntactical sophistication", and furthermore, "his or her relationship to the world, to the group, and to the self is radically different

[3] See Barthes (1975).

from that of the person who can search a computer for data, or read about a character's psychological struggle, or even look up a street name on a city map" (ibid.: 15).

An "oral person", then, is "different" from you and me. He or she has a hard time with sophisticated things. Of course, Bollywood presents no problems as [1] Indian villagers (i.e. oral people) watch it and (thus) [2] it was always already geared toward such a mass (illiterate/oral) audience. Why, indeed, would an Indian filmmaker ever think of the songs in his film as "Brechtian", when his audiences lack "syntactical sophistication"?

Given such a state of affairs, it is hardly surprising that American film criticisms describing Bollywood as a "sort of Brechtian alienation device" are hard to come by. More to the point, once the illiterate Indian villager is described as being "an oral person", replete with all the accoutrements the said status earns him or her, the critic can immediately also claim that "Hindi films are 'anti-psychological'"; that "there is no 'interior' story"; that "nothing exists within a character that is not said" (ibid.: 20). Yet upon examining even the most basic Bollywood film, one can detect several instances of "unspokenness". The frequent song and dance numbers, for instance, are "unspoken" in a double sense: narratively and structurally. Additionally, the song and dance sequences can be seen as instances of "interior" stories, as they reflect, oftentimes, the "fantasies" of the characters. Furthermore, one would have to note all the shared structural aspects of cinema that are used to convey characters' "inner states": the point-of-view shot; mood music; plus, more generally speaking, camera movement and angles.

Nayar, in fact, does seem to acknowledge "the Hindi film's propensity for amplified camerawork", but, again, in her view such technique is "never ironic": "Though perhaps excessive and overwrought to the literate mind, such emphatic cinematography provides cues to the [oral/illiterate] spectator that are easy to read" (2004: 21). Yet again, this is not necessarily the case, as one can quite obviously "misread" the said style, i.e. miss its "irony," or "self-consciousness". And yet such a technique does, indeed, "provide cues to the reader", only ones that are "postmodern", in the sense that their "readability" adheres to a logic akin to that of what Sumita Chakravarty describes as "impersonation", e.g. the play "of/on identities", a "disavowal of fixed identity", or of "fixity" itself (Chakravarty 1993: 4). In other words, Nayar overlooks the transgressive, disruptive semiotics of the Bollywood film, what some have called its *masala*, and others, its bread and butter.

Nayar sees the Bollywood industry as being "largely contoured by the particular cognitive needs of its spectators" (Nayar 2004: 21), in which the movie's "perceived inconsistencies and oft-cited contradictions ... make sense when examined through the prism of orality" (ibid.: 21). I, on the other hand, would suggest looking at the Bollywood film's *filmic* structure

itself—one which, among other things, renegotiates its alleged "commitment to a Manichean world", (ibid.: 21) as well as the overwhelmingly Manichean frame in which it is placed. In this sense the Bollywood film may be seen as what Gayatri Spivak calls a "supplementation" (Spivak 2002), one which "speaks in the language of the subaltern", not so that his/her "representation can be...assured" (Nayar 2004: 22), but rather so that these very concepts—"representation" and "identity"—can be reconfigured.

Such a paradigmatic reconfiguration would subsequently allow for the possibility of (1) cinema/media as supplementation, (2) Bollywood as that particular form of that supplementation in which non-Aristotelian methodologies predominate, and yet (3) empowerment, or rather, "an *uncoercive* rearrangement of desires" (Spivak 2002: 173) occurring at the lowest level. Cinema/media as supplementation would become a "new kind of education" in which the cinematic interaction becomes a way of reshaping both the limited positioning of the subaltern and "the built-in limitation of the intellectual community, with its critical imprimatur derived exclusively from *literate* thought and perception" (Nayar 2004: 22). Only, rather than seeing Bollywood as speaking *for* the subaltern and remaining within the "orality" model (as Nayar would have it), one might argue, following the trope of playback, that Bollywood has not been "speaking" (for the audience or the actors) *and that this has been known all along*. That is, rather than offering up "authentic or valid—or even real—representation" (ibid.: 22), Bollywood presents impersonations that become forms of subaltern self-*questioning*.

The exhibition of Bollywood by either travelling cinema or television in the rural Indian village-setting can be seen as a post-modernizing instrument for teaching, much like a primer's use of images only, in this case, a kinetic and flagrantly non-Aristotelian primer (Spivak 2002: 210–11). Similarly, the viewing of Bollywood (in either of the above technological formats) becomes "an exercise in ... texting" through "the closest general educational facility to which the teachers ... and the students might have access" (ibid.: 219, 221).[4] To see how such "texting" can be achieved, consider the case of "a

[4] As Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers note, "Prior to 1983, television access in India was limited to 28 percent of the nation's population. Only 30 million Indians (less than 5 percent of the population), mostly located in metropolitan cities, regularly watched television. Five years later, in 1988, 62 percent of the population could access television signals, and over 100 million Indians regularly watched television. In 2000, some 90 percent of India's population could access television signals, and over 500 million (50 percent of the population) regularly watched television" (2001: 85). Singhal and Rogers define "people who have access to television" as "those who live in a geographical area where a television signal can be received" (ibid.: 87). Furthermore they note that "Doordarshan's programs, relative to previous decades, increasingly reach rural, poor, and female audiences" (ibid.: 105, n. 14). See also Pendakur (2003: 46–51).

paradigmatic instance of the theme of impersonation" (Chakravarty 1993: 46) in Vijay Anand's 1965 film, *Guide*. *Guide* tells the story of Rosie (played by Waheeda Rehman) and Raju (played by Dev Anand). Raju is a tourist guide in the historic city of Udaipur. His services are enlisted by Rosie's husband, Marco—an archaeologist who, by marrying Rosie, the daughter of a *devadasi*, has "saved" her from the "ignominy" associated with her mother's profession.[5] Marco forbids Rosie from dancing and generally shows more interest in the local caves than in his bride.

Unhappy with her marriage, Rosie tries to kill herself by taking poison. She is discovered by Raju, who cares for her while the oblivious Marco continues his archaeological dig. Later, after discovering what has happened and accusing Rosie of merely trying to attract attention, Marco sends a letter saying (via voice-over as Rosie "reads"), "If you want to leave, leave. Here's 1000 rupees." Passing the letter absent-mindedly to Raju, Rosie walks off, idly leafing through the folded bills. Suddenly she hears the tinkle of anklets and impetuously turns to ask Raju where she might buy some. Having made the purchase, she asks Raju how far it is to Chittor. They hitch a ride on the back of a hay-filled truck and, as they pass a woman carrying a clay urn, Rosie reaches out to snatch it off the bewildered woman's head. Laughing, she places the urn on her own head and turns to Raju, saying, "What kind of a guide are you that you say nothing?" Raju replies:

> I don't understand. Till yesterday you looked like a forty-year-old woman who had lost all her happiness, desires and hopes on the middle of some road. And today you look like a sixteen-year-old girl, innocent, ignorant, full of childhood mischief.

"Do you know why?" asks Rosie. "Why?" replies Raju. Then, following an abrupt cut, Rosie "replies" via playback—the song, *Aaj Phir Jeene Ki Tamanna Hai* (Today again I have a desire to live), suddenly begins:

> I pulled my *sari* wrap from the thorns
> Broke my relationship, put on anklets
> No one should stop my heart's flight

Then, as the camera tracks her movement, Rosie tosses the urn—the camera tilting down to follow its trajectory—as she "sings, "There goes the heart ..." and the urn smashes against the pavement. Rosie is now framed from above, lying back on the moving truck as she sings the melody's title refrain: "Today again I have a desire to live ... Today again I've decided to die (for love)."

After the stanza is "sung" a second time, a brief musical interlude ensues, during which we see the truck stopping. A shot of a man on a camel follows, in

[5] In popular perception the "temple dancer" is paradoxically associated with prostitution.

which first Rosie's hand, and then Rosie, enters from screen-right, handing a bill to the man. The camera cuts to a close-up shot of Raju's face, watching in anticipation and then shrugging, even as the musical interlude concludes and Rosie "sings" the next stanza while riding on a camel:

> I'm not in my own control
> My heart is somewhere then I'm somewhere else

The camera pans right to show a line of camels with riders, then tracks alongside them up to Rosie, singing the next stanza:

> I don't know what my life found
> Laughing I say, ha, ha, ha ...

As the camera tracks right, pulling back as the camel procession advances, another camel-rider enters the frame: a woman whose head and face are completely covered by her shawl. As Rosie repeats the song's title refrain, she playfully pulls her own shawl over her face and head while the other woman pulls her shawl up to first gawk and then laugh at this mimicry. From the following shot of Raju seated on a camel more concerned with eating leaves off a tree, there is an abrupt scene change: with the Chittor tower looming in the background, Rosie runs forward along a raised walkway, dancing as the camera follows her from a low angle. As she continues coming forward (and the camera, pulling backward), more and more of the tower becomes visible/ enters the frame and, finally, Rosie runs out of the shot. The following shot shows her running toward a statue, grabbing its pillars and throwing back her head as she "sings" the next verse:

> Either I'm pent up or a storm
> Someone say where I am.

As Rosie continues singing ("Having come out of yesterday's darkness/I have seen with rubbed eyes"), the camera cuts to a close-up of her in profile, as she turns to face the camera and "sing", "I have decided", before repeating the title stanza for the last time as the camera engages in a series of shot-reverse shots, or eyeline matches, parodying Raju's and Rosie's gazes at one another from different vantage points in the fort. A sudden cut then takes us from Rosie "singing" to Rosie dancing (now only anklets again on the soundtrack) back in her hotel room, while Raju watches her, then compliments her dancing as she comes to a stop.

The visual language of the Bollywood film, as depicted by *Guide* in this sequence, opens up what Homi Bhabha calls "a space of 'translation'":

> [...] a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the Other*,

> properly alienates our ... expectations, and changes, as it must,
> the very forms of our recognition of the 'moment' ... (Bhabha 1989: 117)

Marco is in the cave and there are prisoners in the cave. Recalling one of the oldest allegories of the visual experience, Plato's "Allegory of the Cave", one that is, all-too-often and too-easily applied to the experience of viewing a film,[6] one might say that Rosie, in leaving her husband, has left the cave (the allegorical setting in which he remains chained and which made Rosie a prisoner, too). Consider, then, "what a release from [her] chains it would be, and what a healing for [her] deluded mind".[7] Beyond an echo of this sentiment in the lyrics of the song ("Broke my relationships, put on anklets"; "Having come out of yesterday's darkness"), one can trace this "unchaining" at the formal level of the film: this is precisely the moment the film "breaks free" of its narrative-proper, departs one world, replete with its signifiers and conditions, and abruptly enters another. The *découpage* [i.e. the dividing of action into shots] is literally speeded up, developing new juxtapositions.

Marco is in the cave and Rosie now claims to be "seeing more truly" (ibid.: 232)—as she sings, "I have seen with rubbed eyes". Having left her archaeologist husband behind in his cave, she has "come out of yesterday's darkness", and the operation of her eyes (thus, following the Socratic allegory, her consciousness) has experienced a "disturbance", paradoxically "arriv[ing] at a clearer understanding" (ibid.: 235). Yet all of this is doubled by the formal structuring (and rupturing) of the narrative-proper, which similarly experiences a "disturbance", with incessant cuts from one setting to the next, one shot composition to another. Furthermore, as it is not Rosie (Waheeda Rehman) who technically sings these lines, one has another instance of that Platonic "thrusting out" at the formal level, as Rosie/Rehman is "cut" and replaced with Rosie/Lata Mangeshkar.[8]

One might say, then, that the result of the Bollywood film's "different use of the conventions of time and space" is precisely to place emphasis on

[6] For a classic instance of the application of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" to the film-viewing experience, see Baudry (1992/1975: 690–707).

[7] Plato (1996: 230–31). Indeed, one can trace an inverse parallel between the allegorical function of the anklets in this sequence and the unshackling of the chains that bind the prisoner's legs in the Socratic dialogue.

[8] Mangeshkar, the playback singer for this sequence, is listed in the Guinness World Book of Records as having recorded the most number of songs ever. It should also be noted that all Bollywood film songs employ the technique of playback, in which actor and actress lip-synch to the pre-recorded song. Usually it is the same singer, or singers, providing the voice(s) for almost all the films, e.g. Lata Mangeshkar. This fact is known by Indian audiences, whether they reside in the city or the village. The film songs also play frequently on Indian radio. For more on playback singing and sound, see Arnold (1991).

the *representation* of experience, to reconfigure ideology so that the viewer's "impression of reality" is restructured, or reformulated. And, crucially, it is *the viewer* who functions as the enunciating agency of this discourse. Even before the spectator's identification with a particular character or characters (e.g. Rosie or Raju), there is the "preliminary identification with the (invisible) seeing agency of the film itself as discourse, as the agency which *puts forward* the story" (Metz 1981: 96). In this film, which primarily adheres to "Western conventions", all traces of enunciation are abolished (in conformity with the ideology of presenting "film as reality") and the viewer is made to believe that "he is himself that subject", i.e. putting forth the story. In the case of the Bollywood film the viewer is reminded precisely of the constructed nature of what he or she sees and, thus, through this "realization" on the viewer's part, this film (style) works to announce itself "as a polemic comment on the way things are in their 'natural' reflection" (Teshome 1989: 47). It is precisely in this sense that my reading here deviates from what I consider the "normative" (mis)application of Plato's cave allegory to the realm of cinema. Whereas the typical approach, whether in classical film theory or Indian cultural studies, likens film viewers to the chained prisoners *in* the cave—and thus the film-as-shadow to "delusion"—my aim here has been to demonstrate how the Bollywood film experience comes closer to that of the prisoner who is thrust *out* of the cave, thus recognizing the integral role the Bollywood film can play in the process of "reorientation", itself a first step to enlightenment.[9]

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[9] See Plato (1996: 236).

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25

Sound in the Aboriginal Australian Films of Rolf de Heer

BRUNO STARRS
Queensland University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

Despite his reputation as a cinematic collaborator, Dutch-born Australian filmmaker Rolf de Heer's innovative and varied *oeuvre* has prompted many critics to invoke the French label *auteur*.[1] Such comments suggest that a comprehensive *auteur* analysis of his work is appropriate and as de Heer is the writer, director and producer of most of the films bearing his name, the usually valid criticisms of authorship based on the collaborative nature of filmmaking are less relevant to his work than to that of other directors. While his alternative-styled cinema is more mainstream than *avant-garde*, de Heer's films often feature an unusually elevated presence of sound over the visual *mise-en-scène*, at times raised to a level of dominance amongst the numerous interactions informing the narrative and this has been acknowledged in the literature. Cat Hope comments: "(...) each of de Heer's films merits a detailed treatise on the way they feature innovative sound ideas in the scripting and production stages, resulting in some of the most challenging and exciting cinema made in Australia today" (Hope 2004). Anna Hickey-Moody and Melissa Iocca even invented a new name for the cinema-goer at *Bad Boy Bubby* (1993) when they wrote: "In de Heer's film, the viewer is primarily a listener, or aurator, and secondly a spectator" (Hickey-Moody and Iocca 2004: 78–81) and I have argued the label "aurator" can also be used for the person experiencing *Ten Canoes* (2006) (Starrs 2006: 18–21).

[1] David Stratton writes, "Aussie auteur Rolf de Heer has established himself as an uncompromising film-maker" (Stratton 1998); Ali Sharp states: "de Heer's presence is a victory for auteurism" (Sharp 2004: 34) and Jake Wilson declares: "Rolf de Heer is one of the very few *auteurs* who regularly succeeds in getting features financed in Australia" (Wilson 2003).

This film[2] features dialogue recorded entirely in the Ganalbingu language of the indigenous Aboriginal Australians it stars, and is a prime example of what I would suggest can be labelled "The Aboriginal Australian Films of Rolf de Heer". Three of his recent films have included depictions of Aboriginal Australians and each of the trio utilizes Hope's "innovative sound ideas" to present what I argue is an aural *auteur*'s signature[3] revealing a postcolonial Australian world-view that privileges the justice system and eco-spirituality of Aboriginal Australia.

THE ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN SINGING VOICE AS NARRATOR IN *THE TRACKER*

Most of de Heer's previous feature films—*Tail of a Tiger* (1984), *Incident at Raven's Gate* (1988), *Dingo* (1991), *Bad Boy Bubby* (1993), *Epsilon* (1995), *The Quiet Room* (1996) and *Dance Me to My Song* (1997)—are recognizably set in Australia, yet no Aboriginal person or depiction of an Aboriginal face appears in any.[4] In 2002, however, de Heer changed public perception of his work when *The Tracker* was released as he drew unblinking attention to Australia's history of maltreatment of its indigenous peoples. As I have recently argued, in this film de Heer subverts the genre conventions of Hollywood to create an Australian anti-Western, whereby the European colonizer's celebration of the subjugation of American Indians is contrasted by a sense of Aboriginal mastery of the dead heart of Australia, in which the European colonizer is little more than a bumbling invader (Starrs 2007b: 166–72).

The story of *The Tracker* starts suddenly, with no exposition other than brief subtitles identifying the characters and an opening lament sung by well-known

2 *Ten Canoes* won the *Un Certain Regard* Jury Prize at the Cannes International Film Festival and six Australian Film Institute awards including Best Picture and Best Direction (shared with Aboriginal Australian Peter Djiggir).

3 Hence in this chapter particular attention will be paid to the use of sound in these Aboriginal Australian Films of Rolf de Heer in order to explore if the term coined by Philip Brophy in describing Indian film director Satyajit Ray, that of "aural auteur" (Brophy 2006: 16), may be usefully appropriated to describe this celebrated film-maker, or, if indeed, due to the proclivities of maverick film-makers like de Heer, the term auteur deserves even further categorization.

4 Not that de Heer was without experience in filming indigenous peoples before *The Tracker* (2002): his work commenced in 1997 (belatedly released in 2003) on *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* features the indigenous Shuar of Amazonian Ecuador. But the film is in no way depictive of Australia or aboriginal Australians and that is why it is not under consideration in this chapter. Even de Heer fails to refer to this film, preferring to discuss a much earlier unproduced aboriginal Australian film *The Other Side of the Frontier,* in his recent paper on working with indigenous peoples, "Personal Reflections of Whiteness and Three Film Projects" (2007).

indigenous Australian singer Archie Roach. Vision grows from Peter Coad's still painting of the landscape into shots of three non-indigenous troopers on horseback (the so-called Fanatic, Follower and Veteran) led by the pedestrian and eponymous Aboriginal Tracker (played by the popular Aboriginal Australian actor David Gulpilil), well after a manhunt for an Aboriginal fugitive has commenced. *The Tracker*, with impressive bush skills and ecological expertise, follows the fugitive's almost invisible trail and procures food in what appears to the non-indigenous men to be a desolate, lifeless environment. Little information about the alleged crimes of the wanted Aboriginal man is proffered, nor how the rag-tag bunch of pursuers came to be formed, and eventually the narrative culminates in the brutalized Tracker recycling the neck chains he is forced to wear into a weapon of freedom and justice, using them to hoist the indignant and racist-to-the-end head trooper from his own petard. The sparse script written for the Aboriginal Australian Tracker in this scene is telling in its humanist attitude to the subaltern, contemporary Australian, non-Christian religions de Heer seems interested in: as Gulpilil's character puts it, "God respect Aboriginal law as much as he respect white fella's law. Maybe more." When the Aboriginal fugitive rapes an Aboriginal girl he is finally speared in the leg as decreed fit punishment by Aboriginal Elders. This element of extra-judiciary punition is deemed natural, non-problematic and just, as this conclusion to the affairs enables the Tracker, and the audience, to experience closure and move on.

Although it may at times look like one with its visual iconography, *The Tracker* certainly does not sound like a Hollywood Western. There is no Yodeling Cowboy or Indian tom-toms and the ukulele-playing Follower is soon compelled to abandon and remorsefully burn his instrument in the face of the Fanatic's genocidal mission. Avoiding a cliché soundtrack, the accompanying music to the film is not the Aboriginal musical icons of didgeridoo and clap sticks, yet it nevertheless has a distinctly Aboriginal Australian sound. This is the result of a fruitful collaboration between non-indigenous Australians de Heer as lyricist and Graham Tardif as composer, distinctively filtered through the emotive larynx of Aboriginal folk-rocker Archie Roach as singer. The haunting, plaintive interstitial ballads add vastly to the sombre, melancholy atmosphere created by the film and Michael Atherton notes: "The use of the off-camera singing voice as a narrator is central to the narrative of *The Tracker*" (Atherton 2005: 237).

According to de Heer, the songs are "somehow additive to the action—they don't describe the action, but they're additive to it and some of it, they are reflective of it."[5] The musical numbers comment on the film's diegesis, putting the rare sympathetic words of a non-indigenous male director/writer into the

5 Rolf de Heer, *The Tracker* DVD extra, SBS Movie Show 2002: unpaginated.

onscreen *zeitgeist* of an Aboriginal character for a tale of postcolonial justice found. De Heer also states,

> The words of the song glued themselves to Gulpilil's character, it was as if he was singing them in his mind while the white men rounded up the small group of bush blacks, chained them, interrogated them in a language they didn't understand and then shot them out of frustration and because they were "only" black. The song had elements of a lament, not only for the Tracker but for all Australian Indigenous people. (de Heer 2007)

The music is simultaneously modern (electric) and ancient (traditional language), and as Jake Wilson said: "These contemporary laments, backed by [steel resonator] guitar and Hammond organ, create a kind of fourth-dimensional perspective that complicates our response to the linear narrative—an extraordinary effect, like looking down a corridor of time between past and present" (Wilson 2003). This effect hopefully alerts contemporary Australians to the perils in mirroring the mistakes of the past.

On his official website for Vertigo Productions, de Heer posted a diary of the seven weeks spent shooting *The Tracker,* and the many weeks spent in post-production. This journal makes apparent his particularly strong interest in the audio side of his filmmaking. In week one of shooting, on Tuesday, 27 February, 2001, he wrote, "I hate shooting. I love the writing, like the pre-production (on this film, loved the pre-production), love the post-production (I tell myself during the worst times of any shoot, 'It's okay, you get to do the sound mix on this'), but overall I hate shooting" (Production Notes). He also explains how the quest for the narrating singer began, "Wednesday, May 9, 2001; [...] the vocalist ought to be indigenous [sic], preferably older and with a rough rather than a smooth voice (we'd come to the conclusion a long time ago that the vocalist should be male [...])." Eventually, de Heer was to settle upon the very popular choice of Archie Roach to sing the movie's ballads. De Heer was also involved in the selection process for accompanying musical instruments, "Thursday, May 10, 2001; [...] where dobro, where Hammond organ, where accoustic [sic] or where electric guitar. The tone/mood of each song was decided upon (as best we could with words as well as with the real communicator, music itself)." De Heer's diary is now clearly that of a sound artist enjoying his work:

> Wednesday, May 30, 2001; Another piece of music arrived, and, as is our wont, everything was stopped to deal with that. Receiving and fitting fresh music is about our favourite activity in the entire editing process, a delicious sense of anticipation, sometimes completely fulfilled, sometimes partially, sometimes disappointing.

Subsequently, de Heer gives a telling insight into his philosophy regarding the importance of considering sound first and image second:

> Thursday, May 31, 2001; [...] there are those who argue, with some justification, that it's better to cut the image and make sure it works in story-telling terms without any reliance on sound [...] I'm not sure I agree, because sometimes you shoot stuff to work with sound in a very specific way [...] without the sound working, the cut simply doesn't yet work, and there's no way of knowing, apart from blind faith, whether it ever will.

De Heer also delivers insights into the song-writing process, a skill he admits he is not well practiced at, and reveals how he came to record the original version of the songs with himself standing in as vocalist:

> Wednesday, July 25, 2001; [...] I thought I'd better provide a more accurate guide track for whoever is going to be our vocalist (and that's another story). The only way to do this was to sing the words myself, and record that. Todd (Telford, the studio sound engineer [...]) after an initial laugh or two set to the task of trying to make me sound half reasonable ("Don't worry, I'll stick on a ton of reverb..."), and we threw down some very rough recordings.

Soon, de Heer's own vocal renditions were refined by Archie Roach himself. Referring to the rehearsal process, de Heer wrote,

> Monday, September 17, 2001; We had to call a break then ... people sat silently, I was overwhelmed, Archie was overwhelmed. To have sung this song to these images in his father's language was an experience that rocked him to the core.

More insights into the satisfaction de Heer derived from mixing sound to the visual were included in his last notes on post-production:

> Friday, October 5, 2001; It's hard to imagine that mixing atmospheres and foley [sic] can bring such enjoyment, such satisfaction. But it does, and today was a day of great enjoyment for me, and equal satisfaction.

Roach and his band later performed the songs live in front of sold-out screenings of the film in Melbourne and Adelaide. These unique events had profound effects on the audience (evoking the spirit of the old black and white silent movies with their live accompaniment, thus collapsing the years between 1920 and the twenty-first century Prime Minister John Howard's refusal to say "sorry" to the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal Australians into a single, wince-inducing epoch of national shame) and signifying how much narrative and emotional clout the songs themselves hold. With the sung narration serving so powerfully, de Heer has played away from a dialogue heavy text; after the songs, the silences carry the greatest emotional tension and impact in this film. While developing the script, de Heer said he began to get a strong sense of what the film should be, "and it didn't involve a lot of talking ... Cinema doesn't necessarily need a lot of dialogue. If there's a particular sort of story that's told in a particular way—and that's really what I wanted—it has a sparse feel to it" (Production Notes). Playing over the top of the first shocking massacre

scene, the song "My people" speaks volumes about Australia's shameful acts of genocide, although when the killing begins the soundtrack suddenly becomes empty. Devoid of all sound but that of gunfire and the victim's screams, the vision cuts to a still shot of another of Coad's distinctively child-like paintings of the slaughter. When the vision of the troopers finally returns we see the lead trooper cleaning his gun and extolling to it, "Well spoken. Nice to have a comrade who speaks English", cementing his and our colonial shame.

Finally, de Heer repeats his mantra expressed in the opening pages of this diary:

> Wednesday, October 10, 2001; To experience all the elements and hopes coalescing for the first time is, for me, the very best of all aspects of film making (it's why I say to myself, during the most difficult parts of any shoot, 'It's all right, stick with it, you get to mix this').

With this comment, de Heer confirmed his active interest in sound as a primarily joyful part of his film-making and flagged a decisive factor in the consideration of his status as an example of Philip Brophy's "aural auteur", in that his work "simultaneously problematizes the presumed literary criteria for authorship, and complicates the assumed musicological criteria for composer" (Brophy 2006: 16).

De Heer's aural *auteurism* can also be detected in his subsequent Aboriginal Australian films.

Emphasizing an Aboriginal Australian Language in *Ten Canoes* (Rolf de Heer 2006)

Ten Canoes (2006) opens with the colloquial and cheerful voice over English narration of David Gulpilil (from *The Tracker*), in an accent recognizable to many as Aboriginal Australian. Gulpilil begins by expounding on his people's eco-spiritual theories of creation and reincarnation, before introducing the naked "native" huntsmen marching by, chatting in their own language. By insisting *Ten Canoes* be voiced in the Ganalbingu tongue of its Aboriginal Australian participants, writer/co-director/co-producer Rolf de Heer has made a subtle statement about indigenous pride and accented the sorry state of affairs regarding many contemporary aborigines in Australia. In this film the "magpie goose people" of Arnhem Land are portrayed as empowered people who are in control of their language, their culture and their lives, rather than conforming with the frequent media presentation of Aboriginal peoples as passive victims of colonial aggression, disrespect and maltreatment. When discussing the seemingly perennial Aboriginal problems of substance abuse, domestic violence, long-term unemployment and reduced life expectancy, the descriptor "disadvantaged" is a term that immediately springs to the

minds of some commentators, but de Heer reminds us that it should not be used as an automatic synonym for Indigenes. It is not Aboriginality that causes these problems *per se*, but the way Aboriginal people are marginalized by the colonizer's society. Identifying and addressing the causes of the woe that infiltrates the lives of many contemporary Australian Aborigines remains important, nevertheless, one must not assume they have always been that way—or will always be so. With the help of its unique, gentle and unobtrusive soundtrack, an era of idyllic well-being preceding non-Indigenous settlement of Australia can be imagined, and de Heer convincingly takes the filmgoer back to that black and white time of a thousand years ago—and suggests an even earlier more rapturous Dreamtime which cameraman Ian Jones has lensed in vibrant colour. For the non-Aboriginal de Heer, the starting point was an old black-and-white photograph of canoe-making taken by anthropologist Donald Thomson in the 1930s, which Gulpilil proudly showed him there on site in Arnhem Land: it is an artefact that has become part of the predominantly oral history of the Ramingining people. With their eager participation and assistance, the film was shot on their land: in and around the Arafura Swamp in north-eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia in May and June, 2005, amidst man-eating crocodiles, mosquitoes and leeches. Such trying circumstances certainly tested the physical endurance of both camera and sound crews.

This, de Heer's second Aboriginal Australian film, is the story of Dayindi, played by 17-year-old Jamie Gulpilil (son of David Gulpilil). Dayindi covets one of the wives of his older brother, and to teach him correct cultural protocol, the crafty older brother (Peter Minygululu) tells his potential rival an instructive ancestral story. It is a cautionary Dreamtime tale of doomed love, kidnapping, sorcery, bungling misadventure and ill-directed revenge, which begins seriously with David Gulpilil's voice-over narration; "Once upon a time in a land far, far away …," before he dissolves into giggles and steers the film's ten bark canoes into the mythical waters of Arnhem Land for "a story like you've never seen before". It is also, I believe, a story unlike any the audience has ever heard before.

Referring to the sound design and production in de Heer's cult hit *Bad Boy Bubby* (Rolf de Heer 1993), Hickey-Moody and Iocca call de Heer's audience member an "aurator, and secondly a spectator" (Hickey-Moody and Iocca 2004: 78). They argue that in privileging the intimate noises of Bubby's existence through the use of binaural microphones and producing an intensely claustrophobic atmosphere of "gurgling, eating and pissing" (ibid.) the audience is forced to identify with him and alternatively to be disgusted by him. With the listener positioned between the two microphones, i.e. virtually between Bubby's ears, he or she is perfectly synchronized with the protagonist's journey; the aurator hears through his left ear that which Bubby

hears through his left ear. Michel Chion's hierarchy of aural importance (Chion 1999: 5), the conventional sound model with dialogue occupying the highest and the most important position is dismantled and reversed by use of the binaural microphones. Diegetic sounds not normally incorporated into the audience's experience of the universe of the film become foregrounded; they are unnervingly persistent and strident. The evocative sound environment produced in *Bad Boy Bubby* recalls the experimental sound-scapes of the films of Philip Brophy, which have been chronicled as "the organisation of more complex spatio-temporal relationships ... [that explore] ... methods which have the potential to extend and enrich the vocabulary of film sound and perception" (Samartzis 1998: 50–51). Indeed, understanding the significance of de Heer's use of sound in this and his other films requires academic attention at least equivalent to that which Anahid Kassabian has argued is given to the subject of "reading" in literary studies and "spectatorship" in film studies (Kassabian 2001: 65). With a conventional soundtrack, *Bad Boy Bubby* would have an entirely different effect on its audience, rather the diegetic dialogue is re-positioned in Chion's hierarchy.

In some respects, de Heer has continued his pre-occupation with satisfying the "aurator" in the audience with *Ten Canoes*. Sound recordist James Currie and composer Tom Heuzenroeder sought the "best way to capture the sonic authenticity of the Arnhem Land wetlands" (Oster 2005: 45). With what journalist Sam Oster describes as a proscenium arch look, i.e. mostly wide shots, there was nowhere to place boom microphones and because the actors were almost naked, lapel microphones were not an ideal option. Unscripted takes and a desire not to interrupt the action with battery changes and conventionally interruptive sound recording systems were also important. Oster reports: "De Heer approached Adelaide University to produce a custom device for dialogue recording, and was put in touch with Dr. Matthew Sorell, the research director of the Convergent Communications Research Group at the university" (ibid.). The recording devices were hidden in the naked actor's hair or hung from their necks in traditional pouches and synchronized to a horn sounded on the set each morning. The use of these "hair" microphones resulted in about 100 hours of sound recording per shoot day with Currie having to process about three gigabytes of information each evening. The outcome being that, as Currie, describes; "all these fragmented bits and pieces that we'd shot over the seven weeks had come together to form a shape that I'd never seen before" (ibid.). With its incidental music of traditional Aboriginal instruments, dialogue and singing performed in Ganalbingu and its Aboriginal accented voice-over by indigenous actor Gulpilil, Ten Canoes recalls de Heer's earlier subversive Western, the didactic meditation on racism that is *The Tracker* (2002). Like the singing narrator, Archie Roach, Gulpilil's voice is instantly recognizable to many Australians as an archetypal Aboriginal Australian. The

authentic Aboriginality and the "alien sounds of chirrups, croaks and slithers" (ibid.) ensured *Ten Canoes* had a sound-scape quite unlike any the "aurator" at the Cannes film festival would have heard before.

In an interview, de Heer elaborated on how his respect for the Ganalbingu-speaking actor's preferences over-ruled the expected foreign market needs:

> [...] in Italy they normally dub everything and I said, 'No, they cannot dub the dialogue. The actors don't give permission.' But if we force them to put out a completely sub-titled version, it really marginalises it to small arthouses. What you do is get a good Italian storyteller, one with a third world accent of some sort (because clearly we're not going to find someone who speaks fluent Italian with an Australian indigenous [sic] accent, nor would anybody in Italy recognize it as an Australian indigenous [sic] accent) an African-language accent for example, and you have the storyteller tell that story in that way, then you have an Italian version that would play more broadly, while it still preserves their cultural desire to have their language heard and known. (Walsh 2006: 17)

Not only does the emphasis on an Aboriginal Australian language further the effect of elevating the status of the Aboriginal culture, the storytelling technique of recounting that which is also being seen delivers additional Aboriginal Australian authenticity. De Heer describes Aboriginal storytelling style as one of "cascading repetition":

For example:

> See that man there, see that man sitting on a rock. Now, that man on that rock, he's thinking. He's sitting on that rock and he's thinking about something. That man, see him, thinking about. . . . There might be three concepts in a sentence, and the next sentence repeats those concepts and adds a new one. One of the original concepts might get dropped off and another one put in, but the others are always repeated, sometimes in a different order, and sometimes with a slightly different or elaborated meaning. It's a painful way of storytelling. They'll talk about something that's really obvious that we would never say because it's not part of the story. (Ibid.: 17)

Liz Conor also notes that apart from the obvious significance in foregrounding the Ganalbingu language of the Aboriginal Australians it features, *Ten Canoes* is notable for its storytelling style. Conor writes:

> If we are alert to the things that set pre-contact Aborigines apart from us, de Heer affirms that one real difference lies in the manner of storytelling. The gentle unwinding of events, which include murder, abduction, jealousy and longing, stands in contrast to the addictive heightened emotion of epic Hollywood. (Conor 2006)

By privileging the Ganalbingu dialogue for the actors, an indigenous accent for the English voice-over by well-known Aboriginal Australian actor Gulpilil, and a "gentle", aboriginal Australian style of cascading repetition

narration of story-within-a-story, de Heer's film articulates as Aboriginal Australian in three ways and serves as a rare example of cinema that elevates the marginalized Aboriginal people and their too often overlooked culture. Indeed, the fundamental goal of most of de Heer's films can be seen as one of providing an amplified voice for the unheard, the marginalized, the "Other". As Adrian Martin has pointed out, de Heer tends to identify with "the figure of the naive visionary" (Martin 2000: 30), someone who is isolated from mainstream society. Part of the isolation de Heer's protagonists endure, stems from the struggle to master spoken language. In *Bad Boy Bubby* the socially inept male protagonist mimics the phrases and gestures of those he meets as he stumbles from situation to situation, until, by repetition and sheer good luck, he achieves the zenith of societal struggle; a happy suburban family. As a protest against her warring mother and father, the little girl in *The Quiet Room* (de Heer 1996) becomes mute. The disabled female protagonist in *Dance Me to My Song* (de Heer 1997) can only express herself through a computerized voice-box. In *Alexandra's Project* (de Heer 2003), the alienated wife finds a voice via her video recorder and asserts herself from her emotionally isolating husband. Sandy George, in *The Australian* newspaper, seemed to agree with Martin, stating: "His film, delivered in spite of language difficulties and extreme physical challenges, is another that gives voice to Australians who don't usually have one" (George 2006). Despite their isolation from mainstream society, the Ramingining people have had de Heer tell their story eloquently, and regardless of their unfamiliarity with the English language, have continued to be heard as the press clamoured for interviews. Nicolas Rothwell of *The Australian,* reported: "Bobby Bununngurr recalls being in the canoes on set as more than acting, as being 'full of life, the spirits are around me, the old people they with me, and I feel it, out there I was inside by myself, and I was crying'" (Rothwell 2006).

But with its embedded English narration, its process of bringing the non-Aboriginal film-goer into a story-world that effectively remakes the participants as actors (the cast of mainly non-professionals "performing" as authentic Aboriginal characters in their own Aboriginal culture and in their own Aboriginal home, but simultaneously cultivating venerated status as storytellers), questions may be asked about the extent to which empowerment of the Ganalbingu people really occurs. Does use of the colonizing European's language for the voice-over indicate de Heer's underlying contempt for his subjects as he controls and moulds the narrative to his own cinematic ends? Or does his refusal to "mute" the Ganalbingu tongue by dubbing it in English serve to further empower the colonized Aboriginal people? In this writer's opinion, it is the latter. The Aboriginal Australian sounds coming from a non-indigenous director are not problematic. *Ten Canoes* was first shown at an outdoor basketball court in Ramingining without subtitles at all, much to the

chagrin of the few non-Aboriginals in the audience at the time.[6] For national and international release the concession to non-Ganalbingu speaking audiences in providing English narration is not disempowering, but is rather pragmatic. Unlike the heavy-handed didacticism of his earlier treatise on 1920s injustice to Aboriginals in *The Tracker*, de Heer has subtly articulated his concerns about Aboriginal Australians today. Rather than relying on guilt over the European colonizer's past malfeasance, well-placed humour engages the non-indigenous audiences in both the voice-over and the plot. A long running joke about the sweet tooth of one "Honey Man", gags about men's sexual performance and comic depictions of flatulence, all illustrate the universal humanity of the near-naked characters yet fail to detract from their dignity as pre-colonization, non-industrial, indigenous peoples. Indeed, the mere fact that *Ten Canoes* seeks to tell a Dreamtime story and not a contemporary Western, Christian-influenced narrative, indicates the writer/director's respect. No other film to date focuses to the same extent on simply recounting a Dreamtime world-view. Some non-indigenous directors have even invented their own "Dreamtime" legends, such as Werner Herzog did with his *Where the Green Ants Dream* (1984). Other films have provided brief depictions or references, but *Ten Canoes* is the first to dedicate itself entirely to such. De Heer's story is that of the people of Ramingining and is arguably authentic. All this I have already contended (Starrs 2007c), but without the placement of the film in context of de Heer's *oeuvre* of Aboriginal Australian films and with the elision of any tangential reference to the Aboriginal Australian justice meted out in *Ten Canoes*. When a major plot development requires the settling of a serious inter-tribal dispute, the punishment via spearing the leg is once again non-problematically presented as an acceptable, normalized, extra-judiciary process. As in *The Tracker,* de Heer seems to be saying in *Ten Canoes* that tribal justice, being swift, sufficiently (but not excessively) punitive and involving the Elders of the offended party, is superior to non-indigenous justice systems when dealing with aberrant Aboriginal Australian behaviour. That the criminal eventually dies from the leg-spearing is an event made seemingly less tragic by the spiritual notions of reincarnation, the wise-sounding narration from Gulpilil presents to frame the story within the Aboriginal Australian connection to the land: the dead man will return to the status of a little fish in the billabong, where he will wait to be born again.

In enabling the around 800 inhabitants of Ramingining to tell their own story in their own language of Ganulbingu, with Aboriginal accented English voice-over, in their own way of cascading repetition and foregrounding

[6] There are currently three versions of the film: (1) the Ganalbingu languages dialogue version with English narration and English subtitles; (2) the Ganalbingu languages dialogue and narration version with English subtitles and (3) the Ganalbingu language and narration version without any subtitles.

Aboriginal Australian spirituality and judiciary, de Heer has empowered them to the extent the social malaise of their contemporary indigenous Australians seems an anomaly, not the expected norm, and as the film's success at Cannes indicates, he has managed to reach a very large and appreciative audience. As I have written elsewhere (Starrs 2007d), de Heer's project in remote northern Australia has blossomed into numerous other community-enriching ventures such as a programme for training local youth in video production. *Ten Canoes* is an overwhelmingly positive contribution to the cinematic articulation of the Aboriginal Australian voice.

THE INTER-TEXTUAL ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN IN *DR. PLONK*

De Heer's latest film, *Dr. Plonk* (2007), is a black and white silent film, shot like a Chaplin or Keaton homage on a hand-cranked antique camera. It is the story of the eponymous, time-travelling protagonist from 1907, who is mistaken for a terrorist by our twenty-first century contemporaries and locked up, never to be released. His warning to the law-makers of a century ago about the perils of ecological negligence (and, possibly, television addiction) remain unheard and unheeded (Starrs 2007e).

A seemingly rational scientist and inventor, Dr Plonk (Nigel Lunghi), is married to a caring woman (Magda Szubanski) with a faithful man-servant (Paul Blackwell) in a well-appointed mansion in de Heer's hometown of Adelaide, south Australia. The hard-working doctor calculates that the world will end in 100 years, but his warnings are ignored by the Prime Minister of the day. So he invents a time machine and travels to the future, intent on bringing back incontrovertible proof. What he discovers in 2007 is a polluted, over-industrialized world in which ordinary folk sit side by side in their comfortable living rooms, mesmerized by wide-screen television, as outside the eve of the apocalypse apparently approaches.

This entire film is an exercise in aural *auteurism* in that de Heer has decided there should be no voices to be heard at all and although his decision to make a black and white silent film has been attributed to his discovery of unused film stock deteriorating in his refrigerator at home, a more astute film-goer will observe the many inter-textual references this film voices. Of course, *Dr. Plonk* is not actually silent at all: with a frenetic, relentless, authentically period soundtrack performed by the strings, piano and accordion of "The Stiletto Sisters" and composed by Graham Tardif, the film seems unnaturally blanketed in sprightly wall-to-wall music, permitting equally unnatural and unexpected visual moments of self-reflexive inter-textuality.

Regarding the Aboriginal Australian people, de Heer unexpectedly inserts a scene early in the film in which Dr Plonk accidentally travels back in time 100,000 years, with the indigenous locals emphatically claiming this land as

theirs rather than the property of the colonizers of the last 200 odd years. Encased in his coffin-shaped time machine, Dr Plonk is immediately surrounded by aggressive spear-wielding Aboriginal men who carry him and his contraption onto a fire. The curious thing about the depiction of the Aboriginal Australian men is their costuming: they wear obviously fake afro wigs and grass skirts. Such a visual cliché recalls ignorant and condescending depictions of Pacific Islanders by Hollywood in its wartime musicals and comedies. With this spurious portrayal, de Heer seems to be silently directing the audience to his previous two productions in which he has more accurately depicted Aboriginal Australians. As Jake Wilson summarizes,

> The most inspired scene involves an encounter with an Aboriginal tribe straight out of *Ten Canoes*—they're even filmed in the same way, lined up on the horizon as if for an anthropological photograph. More than an in-joke, the shot is a key to de Heer's ongoing project: the fiction of time travel is revealed as literally a way of rewriting history, a short cut to the long view. (Wilson 2007)

The comic depiction of cannibals enacting the primitive justice of summary execution is later juxtaposed with the comic depiction of inept 2007 "Keystone Kops"-styled policing in which the innocent, well-meaning Dr Plonk is branded a "terrorist" and indefinitely incarcerated, as has happened recently in Australia's real-life involvement in America's war against terrorism. Somewhere between the two extremes lies workable judiciaries, one of which, de Heer seems to be suggesting, is the meditative tribal council that characterizes judicial decision-making in *The Tracker* and *Ten Canoes*. Although de Heer's latest film features the shortest depiction of Aboriginal Australians in all three films mentioned here, it nevertheless conforms to an authorial interest in foregrounding a sense of holistic justice, as intuitively practiced by indigenous Australians. The Aboriginal people of 100,000 years ago, who instantly set out to burn—or perhaps, cook—Dr Plonk, are shown inaccurately in the moments before he successfully returns in his smouldering time machine to 1907. By depicting them in ridiculous costume, de Heer underlines the erroneousness of such a savage characterization. The audience is reminded of his authentic portrayals of Aboriginal people in the other two films this chapter addresses. Unfortunately, regarding sound and the Aboriginal Australian, Graham Tardif's energetic score only changes slightly for this scene, bashing out a couple of bars that recall what early silent film composer Erno Rapee might have called "Jungle Music". Nevertheless, this musical cliché serves to further consolidate the deliberate inaccuracy of de Heer's depiction of Aboriginal Australians.

Dénouement: De Heer Amplifies the Indigenous Voice and Empowers Aboriginal Australians

De Heer explained to journalist Michael Fitzgerald, "People talk about, What is a white director doing making an Indigenous story? But I'm not … They're telling the story, largely, and I'm the mechanism by which they can" (Fitzgerald 2006). Like an amplifier, de Heer takes the oral history of Ramingining, its spiritual and judicial meanings and broadcasts them to his predominantly Christian, courtroom-based legal world of non-Indigenous Australia. When approaching these remote people, de Heer has, in my opinion, realized the potential for unintended cultural arrogance and was prepared to hide any halo of prestige his career had so far created. He states he decided to:

> […] relinquish the almost absolute power normally associated with producing and directing a film and cede it to the people I'd be making this with; give them editorial control and as much responsibility for the film as we, the white film makers, had responsibility. […] It was my (semi-conscious) reasoning that all this had to be dismantled, that notions of superiority and privilege had to make way for a perception by all those involved, white and black, of themselves as equals in the venture. (de Heer 2007)

Cat Hope lauds de Heer for his tendency to "feature innovative sound ideas in the scripting and production stages" (Hope 2004), but I would suggest that his aural ideation anticipates even the scripting stage. In interview, de Heer states "Sound is sixty percent of the emotional content of a film" (Starrs 2007a:18–21) and his online diary reflects his love for post-production sound editing. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that he is constantly aware of how he wants his films to not just look but sound. In *The Tracker,* he wanted the film to sound as if it were the postcolonial voice of Aboriginal people, so he utilized a recognizably Aboriginal Australian singing narrator whose music is simultaneously modern and ancient. In *Ten Canoes* he wanted the Ganalbingu people to sound empowered and in control of their pre-colonial culture. So he directed all actors to speak in their native language and insisted that even his Italian producers refrain from dubbing the film for overseas markets. In *Dr. Plonk,* a film in which he is primarily concerned with Western society's head-long descent into environmental apocalypse and associated dependence on television, he manages to slip in an inter-textual reference to tribal justice, a form of which he so ruthlessly parodies in his subsequent depiction of 2007 treatment of a terror suspect in the same film. Sound in de Heer's latest offering features much less of an interest in amplifying the indigenous voice than the previous two Aboriginal Australian films, and this writer concedes *Dr. Plonk* may not deserve to be included in the nominal grouping. Nevertheless, when its role as an inter-textual signpost to his other work is considered, *Dr. Plonk*

serves to remind audiences of the typically non-authentic Aboriginal films produced by less respectful film-makers.

De Heer is not the first to attempt to lend an Aboriginal acoustic sensibility to their films: Marjorie Kibby describes the soundtrack to *Rabbit-proof Fence* (Philip Noyce 2002) as expressing "an Australia that is something closer to the Aboriginal perception of it, the land as a living thing with a spirit and a voice" (Kibby 2005: 157), yet its didgeridoo combined with world music ranging from North American drumming to Ravi Shankar's sitar falls somewhat short of authentically articulating the aurality of Australian Aboriginality. In his *auteur* analysis of another Hollywood-based Australian film-maker Peter Weir, Jonathan Rayner states: "[Weir's] career is marked by a European brand of art-film auteurism, based on personal writing and visual expression, in Australia, and by an American brand of auteurism, based on genre revision, in Hollywood" (Rayner 2003: 12). This distinction between the *auteurism* of the two continents is curiously undeveloped in the literature, and I would tentatively suggest that there actually exists a typically Australian kind of *auteur* in whose work an interest in specifically Australian issues predominates. Such Australian *auteurism* is not rare, but usually sees promising writer/directors succumbing to the world-view flattening effect of Hollywood and its cash incentives. Resisting tinsel-town, de Heer remains based in small-town Adelaide, south Australia, surviving from film to film and making the French terminology used to describe him seem artificial, affected and foreign. Nevertheless, despite the over-alliteration of the phrase "Australian Aural *Auteur*", such a mantle may, indeed, be appropriate for Rolf de Heer.

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26

Living and Learning in a New Language and Culture

A Linguist's Experiences

Annie Vinod Wilson
Nagpur University, India

When I started living in a Rathwa Barela village with my husband and son, people brought a storyteller to our hamlet. Through the night he told us the story of King Tharachand and his maid. "The king ate a fruit called *jamun*, i.e. black plum and the lady ate the left over and she bore a son to the king." The story went on and when it ended, the narrator told us: "Take my story to Delhi and they will appreciate it". At that point of time I never thought that I would one day actually attempt to do this. But after spending five years among the Rathwi Bareli speaking people, I am bringing you stories of several people. Rathwa Barela people live in western India and number over one million.

Language Learning

Many people helped us in learning their language. Many appreciated our progress though some were pretty critical. An *anganwadi* worker (pre-school teacher), wanting to test my ability to comprehend their language, looked at my growing tummy and commented, "I think your son Vishal is going to get a sister/brother". Suddenly I retorted saying I did not eat any black plum and the onlookers burst out laughing.

The differences in phonology and grammar of Rathwi Bareli, the language of my research (an Indo-Aryan language) and Malayalam, my mother tongue (a Dravidian language), are numerous and had been a major hurdle to be overcome. For example, there is no major contrast between aspirated and unaspirated sounds in Malayalam phonology. But in Rathwi Bareli, there are many minimal pairs of words which contrast only in aspiration.

e.g. bonawno: "to make"
bhonawno: "to teach"

In my mother tongue, there is no agreement whatsoever. Whether the subject is masculine or feminine, singular or plural, first person, second person or third person, there is no change to the form of the verb. But in Rathwi Bareli, we have to give attention to the changes in the form of not only verbs and adjectives, but also adverbs and even postpositions like "from" and "for". These differences are based on the gender, number and person of the subject and even the object in some cases.

However, it is encouraging when we now hear things like "... you didn't know our language, but now you know everything", and even "... your son speaks better than you".

Living in a New Culture

When we first visited the language area, after our marriage, I was wearing a *churidar*, not a *sari*. I took maximum effort to show that we were indeed married by wearing a wedding ring and a chain of black pearls around my neck. Despite my best efforts, the locals thought we were not married simply because I was wearing a *churidar*. Some of them are still not convinced that we were a married couple then and they often make comments such as, "... you were unmarried then".

In addition to language differences, the food habits, cultural practices, beliefs and worldview are also very different from mine. We, in Kerala, my home state, spend a lot of time in cooking and have delicious varieties of food for a meal. But in many homes here I see they make only one curry and that too in very limited amount. Many women and children eat dry roti with chilly. Marriage is something very special for all of us where the bride and the bridegroom are the centre of attention. But here most often in the marriage ceremony, the bride and bridegroom are absent. I have heard of people appeasing ancestral spirits, but here everyday life is governed by their belief in the ancestral spirits. Even while having tea, they put a drop aside for the spirits.

There is a practice called "dhaasya" among them which is worth emulating. When somebody constructs a house, all the others in his hamlet come and help him to finish the work quickly. He later visits their houses to return the kind action. This kind of community fellowship is not just limited to house construction, but is also seen during marriages where women bring *rotis* from their own homes to be served for the guests.

I have gone through a lot of experiences in the last five years, some encouraging and some not quite so. I would like to share some that raises concerns of their health, social welfare and education.

HEALTH ASPECTS

One afternoon, on coming out from my village house, I noticed a man leading a sick person flapping a towel over her. As they came close by, I realized that it was an old sick woman who was being brought by her son to the government hospital. The pharmacist and the nurse in the hospital, who were standing at the bus stop, asked him to take her to the ward boy as they were about to go back home. Immediately the bus came and they went off. The ward boy gave some ointment in a paper and sent them off. We went to see them and it was a heartbreaking scene. The woman was suffering from leprosy. The bones of her hands were visible where the skin and flesh had gone. Flies infested the lesions and the son, aged around 35 years, struggled to ward them off with the towel. I cleaned some of the sores with an antiseptic and applied the ointment and covered many areas with gauze. I brought her some food, but she declined it. Instead she offered it to her son saying "you eat as you are hungry".

The women and her son had come from the nearby village in the hope of receiving good treatment at the government hospital. This sixteen-bed-hospital caters to the needs of almost 10 panchayats. But the reality is that, with super specialty hospitals mushrooming in all the big towns, no doctors want to work or stay at hospitals such as this one. This compels us to ask several questions regarding the state of rural healthcare in India. What will happen to tribal villages, where Gandhiji said that the soul of India resides? Who will take the initiative on behalf of these marginalized voiceless poor people?

In these villages, lacking social support, many elderly people are simply abandoned by their children as they lose the physical strength to earn a living. For many, aged parents are an unwanted burden. One of the tales we came across likens the last days of human beings to those of an owl. As I picked up the language, many old mothers would share their miseries with me. I longed to do something for them.

SOCIAL WELFARE: NEED OF ADVOCACY

Let me tell you another story, the story of Premsingh who lost his wife. I first met Premsingh when I went to collect data for my M.A. thesis. Later as we have moved fully to the language area, he would visit us regularly. He would often narrate his experiences to us. He used to joke, "I am turning on my cassette". Premsingh had led a comfortable life with a wonderful family. His wife had been a good companion to him, while his children were good students. However, all these proved short-lived, when one of his relatives, driven by jealousy, raped his wife. Premsingh's wife fell ill. To pay for her treatment, Premsingh leased his land and made every effort to get her treated. But she died, leaving behind her husband and seven children.

The road to justice was not quite simple for him. The village chief refused to take action against the offender and forced Premsingh to declare him innocent. Unable to come to terms with his loss, he lost his mental balance and took to drinking. At last someone took him to a religious guru, who helped him quit drinking. Today he has remarried and has had two more children. He says: "I will educate my children and let them fight for justice in this unjust world."

He has many more painful stories to narrate. Once he took his elderly uncle, who was very sick, to the district hospital 150 km away. Despite the uncle having an Anthyodaya card, a medical insurance card for the poor which entitled him to free medication and treatment in government hospitals, the doctor prescribed a couple of tablets without even examining him. Even though Premsingh pressed for further investigations, the two were callously sent off by the doctor.

The problem here is not the lack of government schemes, of which there are an ample number for the upliftment of tribal people. This issue here is callousness and corruption, which is so rampant that the tribals are unable to avail themselves of the schemes meant for their welfare. Many projects and schemes, which exist on government records, are in reality non-existent. For example, the government is supposed to provide money to each house-owner for building a toilet. Not a single toilet has so far been built in this village under this scheme, though official records show that many such toilets have already been constructed. Who will speak up for the human rights of people like these? Who will make the voice of people like Premsingh heard to the world?

Need for Social Reforms

Child marriage

One of the positive things about the Barela culture is that a girlchild is not considered a burden. This is because, during marriage, the girl's father gets bride price from the boy's side. But the flip side is that the weaker sex is not treated with dignity. In fact, the fathers "sell" their daughters like animals for a bride price and many of them spent it on drinking. This practice has even given birth to a saying among the girls, "*mar babu mesek wecheen khay ledu*", which means "my father sold and ate me".

Girls between the age of 14 and 15 often run away with younger boys, may be 12 or 13. In his house she has to work in the field from morning till evening and cook food for the joint family. In the boy's house the girl has to labour in the field throughout the day and at night cook for the joint family. One of the daughters-in-law said, in their home, she has to make *rotis*

out of eight kilogram flour for one time meal. They use mainly cowdung cakes as fuel.

Marriage is mainly a trial and error affair in Barela culture. If a bride does not like the groom, she runs away from the groom's house. If she has borne children, they belong to the boy's family. So she has to leave then behind and try another person. As a result many children are left motherless. One day, a boy, 18 years of age, came to our house. He shared his heart-breaking story with us, 'I married three times and within one or two months the girls ran away'.

Financial Mismanagement

The Rathwa Barelas are a hard-working agrarian community. In this part of the country, although the land is not very fertile and rainfall is low, the Rathwa Barelas cultivate corn, wheat, different kinds of millets, vegetables and cotton.

Unfortunately, what they really lack is training in efficient finance management. Most of the farmers sell their freshly harvested crops for a pittance, not storing much for consumption at home or for seed stock. A large part of the little they earn is spent on liquor. They spend lavishly during harvest festivals and treat their guests to liquor and meat. Once a year they buy clothes for the entire household and pay back the amount with interest during the next harvest. As a consequence food stocks run out even before the next crop and they end up buying inferior quality grains, spending three times the amount they had received earlier. They depend on creditors and pay huge amounts as interest.

For example, one of our friends repairs bicycles, earning a minimum of Rs 60 a day. He spends Rs 10 on *paan* (betel leaf usually with areca-nut, tobacco and lime wrapped into it) and Rs 20 on liquor. What is left is used up to take care of the needs of his wife and six children.

The government has set up many Self-help Groups (SHGs), but unlike the ones in Kerala, they are not run as efficiently as in this part of the country.

Exploitation of the Poor

The powerful and the financially well-off exploit the weak, and poor and do not let them come up in life. When we moved in, many poor people narrated stories which reflected the insecurities of the moneyed class. We did not understand it then, but as time went by we began to understand the sad significance of their experiences.

As I have mentioned earlier, there are many government schemes for the welfare of the tribals, but few of these are implemented at the grass-root level. The beneficiaries of the few schemes that do get implemented are the powerful people within the community—those who own more land and money or hold important positions, like the village chief.

Education

If you ask a person about his/her age, he/she will say "*kai malom*?" or ask a pregnant woman about her date of delivery, she will reply, "*kai malom*", which means who knows? This goes to show the level of ignorance and illiteracy among the people. Only about 10 per cent of the Rathwa Barelas are semi-literate. Now, owing to the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA)—"Education for All"—scheme of the government, some improvement in school enrollment has been noted, but the dropout rates are still quite high, quite contrary to the optimistic view presented by the government records.

The condition of the *anganwadis* (government pre-schools) run by the Department of Woman and Child Development is even worse. In our *sankul* (cluster), comprising four village panchayats, there are 22 *anganwadis*. Of the 22 teachers, only four can read and write properly. For many of them, their husbands write the monthly reports; otherwise a colleague does the job against a payment of Rs 100. In most of the pre-schools only mid-day meals are provided and no actual teaching is carried out. The teachers are not adequately trained to teach. On top of that, they are entrusted with a lot of other work, like keeping records of pregnant women, nursing mothers and very young children, moving around with the health department nurses to vaccinate children and distribute medicines. Teaching is just one of the five components of their job description. The remuneration is very little compared to the work they are expected to do. In Kerala, the SHGs take care of the extra work like distributing medicines. Here, as female literacy is very low in these villages, the *anganwadi* workers are forced to organize and run the SHGs.

Recently, the Madhya Pradesh government have exempted primary school teachers from non-academic additional work to allow them to concentrate on teaching. Something similar must be done for the pre-school teachers as well.

I would suggest a restructuring of the whole pre-school system. In recent years the government has introduced Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres called Shishu Shiksha Kendras under the banner of SSA in hamlets where there is no anganwadi. I presume that the teachers appointed for these ECE centres are at least literate, since these appointments were made recently. I recommend two things in this regard:

- De-linking of the education aspect from the work definition of *anganwadi* workers so that they can concentrate on the other four aspects of childcare,
- Appointment of more ECE teachers even in the existing *anganwadis* for handling the pre-school component.

This would bring the whole of pre-school education under the government initiative within the ambit of SSA, and thus the responsibility of the School Education Department. (Presently some pre-school education is

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